

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Thursday, July 13

Senior Menu: Salisbury steak, mashed potatoes, carrots, apricots, whole wheat bread.

Softball hosts Webster (U8 at 6 p.m., U10 at 6 p.m. DH, U12 at 7:30 p.m. DH)

T-Ball Black at Andover, 6 p.m.

## Friday, July 14

Senior Menu: Hamburger gravy, mashed potatoes, green beans, tropical fruit, whole wheat bread.

Jr. Legion hosts Aberdeen Smitty's, DH, 5:30 p.m.  
U10BB State Tourney in Parker

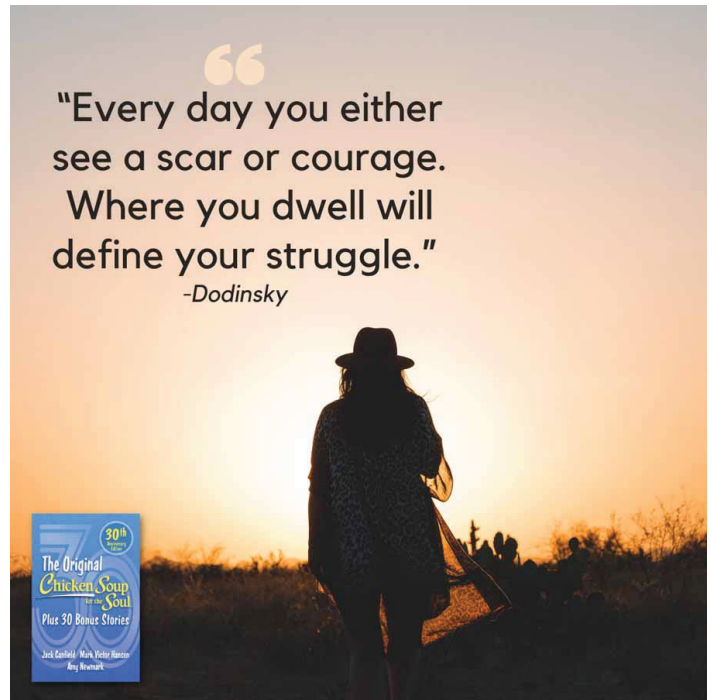
## Saturday, July 15

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship at Rosewood Court, 10 a.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. ago 1 p.m.

Jr. Legion at Brookings (vs. Harrison, 1 p.m.; vs.



Brookings, 3 p.m.)

U10BB State Tourney in Parker

## Sunday, July 16

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m.; worship at Avantara, 3 p.m.

Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:30 a.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m., SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

United Methodist: Conde worship at 8:30 a.m., coffee hour 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship at 10:30 a.m.  
Amateurs host Miller, 6 p.m.

**Groton Daily Independent**  
**PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445**  
**Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460**

**OPEN:** **Recycling Trailer in Groton**  
The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.  
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## The Bulletin by Newsweek

JULY 10, 2023

### World in Brief

next year's presidential election for allegedly inciting an insurrection.

BBC News's highest-paid journalist, 61-year-old news anchor Huw Edwards, was named by his wife as the presenter facing allegations he made payments for sexually explicit photos of a teenager. Police clarified that no criminal offense took place.

Elon Musk has launched xAI, a new artificial intelligence company aimed at understanding "the true nature of the universe."

The U.N. has announced the discovery of 87 bodies buried in a mass grave in Sudan's Darfur region, in an escalation of the ethnic violence which has gripped the country since April.

A tornado touched down near Chicago's O'Hare International Airport, causing damage in parts of the region, disrupting flights, and prompting people to take shelter.

In the ongoing war in Ukraine, at least one person was killed and several others were injured in overnight Russian drone strikes on Kyiv. Russia's "muted" response to pro-Ukraine developments at this week's NATO summit could mean that "the Kremlin has internalized" setbacks suffered in the war, the Institute for the Study of War said.

#### TALKING POINTS

"The President shall not suspend, terminate, denounce, or withdraw the United States from the North Atlantic Treaty, done at Washington, DC, April 4, 1949, except by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, provided that two-thirds of the Senators present concur or pursuant to an Act of Congress." A joint resolution by Senators across the aisle read, as lawmakers introduced a bill to block U.S. presidents from attempting to leave NATO without congressional approval.

"The reason why this lawsuit is so important is because that day, while tragic and just disgusting, what was more disgusting was that people were tagging me and Zaire's dad in the video on social media. We did not want to see that. No one should be looking at that. It wasn't a movie. It wasn't pretend," said Zeneta Everhart, the mother of a Buffalo mass shooting victim, while at a press conference announcing a lawsuit filed against social media companies.

#### WHAT TO WATCH IN THE DAY AHEAD

The U.S.-Nordic Leaders' Summit takes place this afternoon in Helsinki, Finland. President Joe Biden will participate in the summit following his scheduled bilateral meeting with Finnish President Sauli Niinistö.

More inflation data is scheduled a day after a report showed that consumer prices rose at the slowest annual rate since March 2021. The producer price index for June is due at 8:30 a.m., along with the weekly report on initial jobless claims. The federal budget is due at 2 p.m. ET.

Today marks the 10-year anniversary of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. BLM is celebrating the milestone with a Defund the Police Week of Action.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken is set to meet top Chinese diplomat Wang Yi in Indonesia as officials gather for the ASEAN foreign ministers meeting, the latest in a series of interactions between officials of the world's two superpowers.

China-based hackers have secretly accessed email accounts of about 25 organizations, including government agencies, Microsoft said. The State and Commerce Departments have confirmed they were affected by the breach.

The Justice Department filed appeals against eight sentences handed to Oath Keepers members for their roles in the Jan. 6 Capitol attack, including an appeal challenging the prison term handed to the group's founder, Stewart Rhodes.

Two advocacy groups, Free Speech For People and Mi Familia Vota Education Fund, are calling on officials in several states to bar Donald Trump from running in

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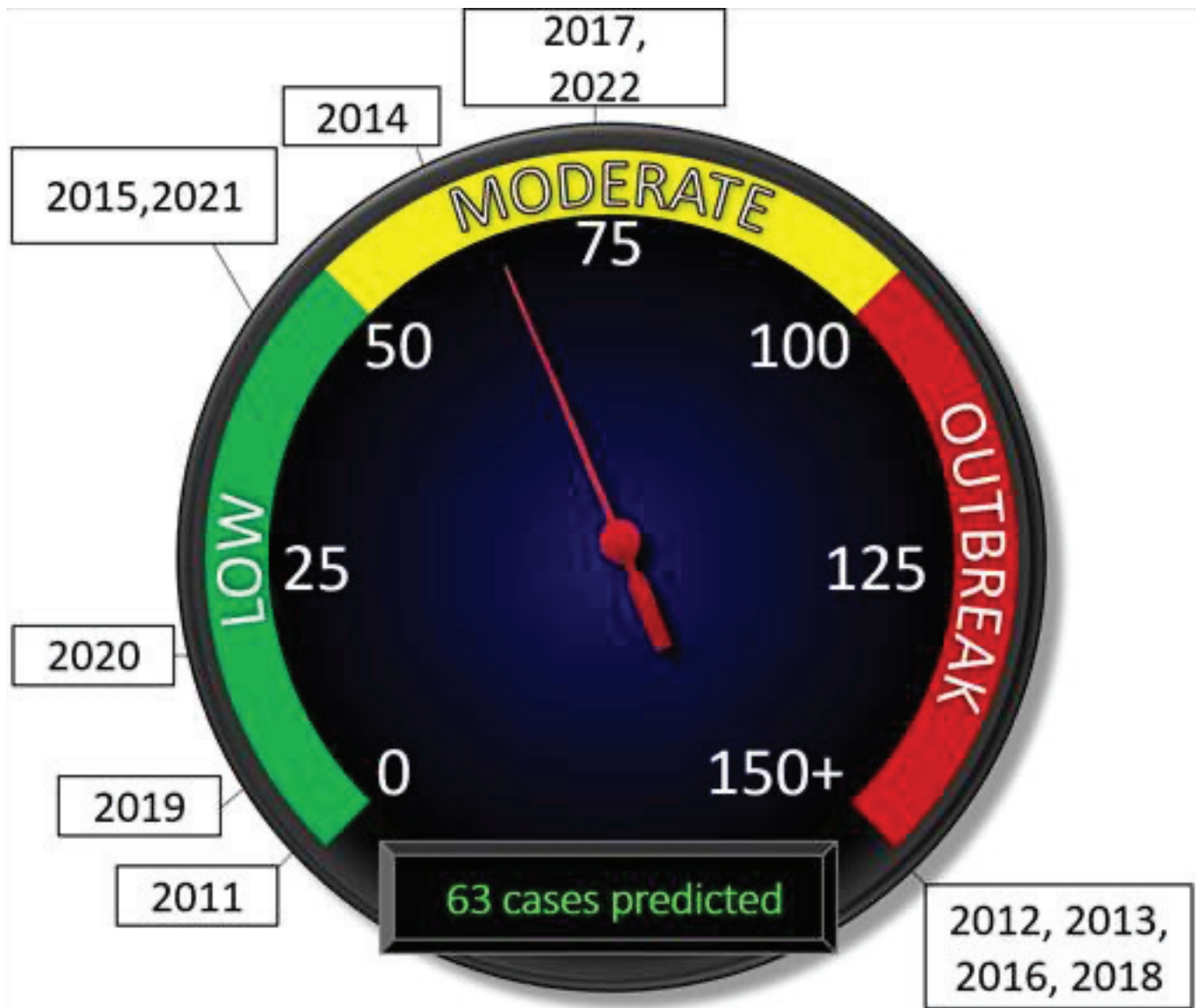
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## West Nile Update – South Dakota, July 12, 2023

4 human cases reported (Beadle, Campbell, Jerauld, Sanborn)  
3 counties with positive mosquito pools (Beadle, Brown, Minnehaha)

US WNV (as of July 11): 36 cases (AZ, GA, IA, LA, MO, NE, OR, SC, SD, WY)

WNV Prediction Model – Total Number of Cases Projected for 2023, South Dakota (as of July 12)



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## Groton Jr. Teeners Make Comeback Attempt, But Fall To Selby

Groton Jr. Teeners 14U's effort to come back from down five runs in the fifth inning came up just short, as they fell 7-5 to Post 100 14U on Wednesday. This was the championship game of the regional tournament being played in Selby. Groton Jr. Teeners closed the gap by scoring on a walk, a double, and a single.

Groton Jr. Teeners lost despite out-hitting Post 100 14U nine to six. TC Schuster led Groton Jr. Teeners with three hits.

Groton Jr. Teeners were the first to get on the board in the second when Schuster doubled, scoring one run.

Post 100 14U took the lead in the bottom of the fourth inning after Keegan Russell was struck by a pitch, Thatcher Kihne walked, and Post 100 14U scored on a passed ball, each scoring one run.

Russell earned the win for Post 100 14U. They allowed five hits and two runs over five and one-third innings, striking out four and walking six. Schuster took the loss for Groton Jr. Teeners. They went four innings, giving up four runs (three earned) on two hits, striking out seven and walking five.

Schuster, the number nine hitter for Groton jr. Teeners 14U, led the way with two runs batted in. They went 3-for-4 on the day. Tristin Mcgannon and Nick Groeblichhoff each collected multiple hits for Groton Jr. Teeners. Groton Jr. Teeners had a strong eye at the plate, tallying nine walks for the game. Braeden Flihs, Lincoln Krause, and Ethan Kroll led the team with two walks each. Groton Jr. Teeners were sure-handed in the field and didn't commit a single error. Krause had the most chances in the field with nine.

Kihne and Russell were a one-two punch in the lineup, as each drove in two runs for Post 100 14U. Xavier Hobert led Post 100 14U with two hits in two at bats. Post 100 14U had a strong eye at the plate, collecting seven walks for the game. Xavier Ritter and Kihne led the team with two free passes each. Hobert and Luke Fiedler each stole multiple bases for Post 100 14U. Post 100 14U ran wild on the base paths, accumulating six stolen bases for the game. Post 100 14U turned one double play in the game. Post 100 14U didn't commit a single error in the field. Kaden Russell had the most chances in the field with eight.

## Groton Locke Electric With Tough Game Against Aberdeen

Groton Locke Electric couldn't keep up with Aberdeen and fell 18-2 on Thursday.

Aberdeen got on the board in the top of the first inning after Colton Cox hit a solo home run to left field, Kelly Coates doubled, scoring one run, Ryan Ellingson doubled, scoring two runs, and two runs scored on another play.

A single by Coates extended the Aberdeen lead to 7-1 in the top of the second inning.

Aberdeen added to their early lead in the top of the third inning when Micheal Babcock doubled, scoring two runs, Cox scored after tagging up, and Coates doubled, scoring one run.

Aberdeen scored five runs on five hits in the top of the sixth inning. Coates drew a walk, scoring one run, Tyler Oliver doubled, scoring two runs, Ellingson singled, scoring one run, and Oliver scored after tagging up.

Jacob Beuster earned the win for Aberdeen. They allowed one hit and two runs (one earned) over five and one-third innings, striking out five and walking three. Wyatt Locke took the loss for Groton Locke Electric. The right-handed pitcher went four and one-third innings, allowing 13 runs on 13 hits, striking out one and walking six.

Brian Hansen went 2-for-3 at the plate to lead Groton Locke Electric in hits. Groton Locke Electric were sure-handed in the field and didn't commit a single error. Hansen had the most chances in the field with six.

Aberdeen amassed 18 hits in the game. Cox, Babcock, Coates, and Niko Pezorelle each collected three hits for Aberdeen. Coates and Ellingson each drove in four runs for Aberdeen. Oliver collected two hits for Aberdeen in three at bats. Aberdeen had a strong eye at the plate, accumulating nine walks for the game. Coates and Oliver led the team with two walks each.

## Car Show Winners



**Darren Adam** took second place in the Mopar division with his 1965 Plymouth Fury III. (Photo courtesy April Abeln)



**Roger Hansen** took second place in the Ford division with his 1957 Ford Fairlane 500. (Photo courtesy April Abeln)



**Jim Brakefield** took first place in the Olds/Buick/Pontiac division with his 1955 Buick Special. (Photo courtesy April Abeln)



**Jim Leibel** took second place in the Truck Division with his 1963 Chevy C-10. (Photo courtesy April Abeln)

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**Erwin Kormendy took second place in the open division with his 1928 Chevy Coupe.** (Photo courtesy April Abeln)



**Corbin Weismantel took first place in the youth division with his 1988 Ford F150.** (Photo courtesy April Abeln)



**Justin Fordham won the People's Choice Award with his 1969 Oldsmobile Cutlass.** (Photo courtesy April Abeln)



**Lynnette and Brad Cotten took second place in the Chevy Division with their 1967 Chevy Chevelle.** (Photo courtesy April Abeln)

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**Dylan Krueger took second place in the Youth Division with his 1974 Chevy Camaro.**

(Photo courtesy April Abeln)



**Cindy Reinbold took first place in the Olds/Buick/Pontiac Division with her 1964 Buick Riviera.** (Photo courtesy April Abeln)



**Mike Wiltfang took first place in the Street Rod division with his 1934 Plymouth All Steel Coupe.** (Photo courtesy April Abeln)



**Scott Morrison has Best of Show and took second place in the Street Rod division with his 1932 Ford Highboy.** (Photo courtesy April Abeln)

**No photo available for Kerry Cameron who took first place in the Mopar Division with his 1962 Dodge Polara 500.**

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**Joe and Linda Torrence took first place in the Chevy Division with their 1965 Chevy Chevelle.** (Photo courtesy April Abeln)



**Bobbie Schweigert took first place in the open division with his 1951 Henry J.** (Photo courtesy April Abeln)

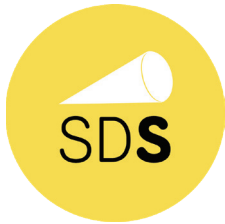


**Terry Haaland took first place in the Ford Division with his 1955 Fairlane Ford.** (Photo courtesy April Abeln)



**Gary Huggett took first place in the Truck Division with his 1942 Chevy Pickup.** (Photo courtesy April Abeln)





## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### **Law enforcement commission offers forgiveness for marijuana use Parkston officer, potential Roberts County deputy pledge to support their communities**

**BY: JOHN HULT - JULY 12, 2023 5:03 PM**

Two law enforcement hopefuls were offered forgiveness for cannabis use by the South Dakota Law Enforcement Officers Standards Commission on Wednesday in Pierre.

The vote for Parkston Police Officer Kody Beckers makes him eligible for certification in the state in spite of a seven-year-old guilty plea to THC wax possession during his freshman year of college in Minnesota. THC is the compound that gives marijuana its high.

A future Roberts County sheriff's deputy, meanwhile, was offered a shot at certification despite her use of a tribal medical marijuana card – which isn't recognized by the state – to treat pain with marijuana last summer after a surgery.

The two decisions were among more than a dozen calls made by the commission on Wednesday on certification or recertification of officers, canine units and reciprocity for out-of-state or Indian Country officers seeking state certification.

Several of those decisions involved brief appearances by officer hopefuls and their employers. Other decisions, such as the canine unit recertifications, were voted on in bulk after staff rundowns.

Minnesota crime considered

Given the nature of his situation, Kody Beckers appeared before the commission for a contested case hearing that played out similar to a court appearance.

Beckers was offered a plea deal in Minnesota for the 2015 crime of THC wax possession, a felony in that state at the time that remains a felony in South Dakota. People who plead guilty to felonies are typically ineligible for employment in law enforcement in the state.

He was given a stay of adjudication in exchange for an admission of guilt, which made him eligible to have the conviction scrubbed from his record after a successful stint on probation. Beckers completed his probation, and later had the crime expunged from his record.

"I'm not going to fabricate an excuse. It was a mistake. I was in college, my freshman year," Beckers told commissioners. "Looking back at it now was a blessing in disguise for me. I turned my whole act around."

Beckers would go on to earn his undergraduate degree at Southwest Minnesota State University in Marshall and worked for a while as a certified nurse assistant, but decided to return to school to earn a law enforcement certification through Minnesota State Community and Technical College.

"I wanted to find a way to obtain my sense of purpose in helping people," Beckers said.

His education from Minnesota Tech qualified him for a law enforcement certification, but the prior felony was a snag. The Minnesota Police Officer Standards and Training Board granted Beckers a variance that would have allowed him to be certified in that state.

The job he found after earning that variance was in Parkston.

Beckers said he loves South Dakota and feels he can do a lot of good as an officer. At one point during his five months of employment in Parkston, he told commissioners, he was able to track down a man suspected of sex trafficking a 14-year-old girl.

He was put on administrative leave in May as his reciprocity application was reviewed, but he said the city of Parkston has pledged to hire him back if the commission saw fit to certify him to work in the state.

Beckers' fitness for duty was less of an issue than South Dakota law, however. State law does not allow the commission to certify potential officers who've pleaded guilty to a felony, but it does allow the body

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to grant exceptions for those given a suspended imposition of sentence in the state.

A stay of adjudication under Minnesota law is a near-mirror of South Dakota's suspended imposition of sentence statutes, Division of Criminal Investigation Attorney Kelly Marnette told commissioners.

Even so, the state law allowing leeway for the latter in law enforcement certification decisions makes no mention of similar modes of sentencing in other states. Without guidance from state law, Marnette said, the commission would need to rely on its own administrative rules, which say a person convicted of a felony cannot be a certified law enforcement officer in the state.

"I'm not saying that this candidate is not a worthy candidate for certification in South Dakota," Marnette said. "The question is, 'Do you have the authority, under the way that some statutes and rules are written at this time, to do what Minnesota did in granting a variance?' ... I'll leave it to you to decide."

After more than 40 minutes of closed executive session discussion, the commission sided with Beckers. Lincoln County State's Attorney and commission member Tom Wollman said it was a tough-but-correct call for an officer whose crime took place so long ago.

"I think that this is an appropriate consideration for this board," Wollman said. "We have pretty clear authority under our state law. It gives us that discretion."

Beckers will be required to undergo periodic drug testing as a condition of eligibility for certification.

## Medical marijuana use forgiven

The commission reached a similar conclusion for Alicen Fladland. She appeared Wednesday with the support of Roberts County Sheriff Tyler Appel, who hopes to hire her as a deputy and get her in line for the certification course that would set her on the path to a career in South Dakota law enforcement.

She's worked for Appel since 2021, first as a dispatcher and later as a correctional officer. Appel would like to see her move up into a deputy role, which would require law enforcement certification.

On her application for that certification, however, Fladland admitted to using marijuana in 2022. She later told investigators that she'd obtained a medical marijuana card through the Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe after a knee surgery. She'd explained to Appel that she went that route to avoid potentially addictive prescription painkillers, but didn't realize that tribal medical marijuana cards are not recognized by the state.

"She thought she was going through the legal way to manage that pain," he said.

Fladland said she was thankful for the opportunity to be considered for potential certification.

"I am an honest and hard-working person and I will do whatever I can to improve our community," Fladland said.

Hank Prim, who leads law enforcement training for the state Division of Criminal Investigation, recommended a reinstatement of eligibility.

"She was honest on her application," Prim said. "Had she not been honest on her application, there's a good chance that the law enforcement commission would not have known about it."

Attorney General Marty Jackley, an ex-officio member of the commission, moved to reinstate her eligibility on the condition that she submit a new application. Commissioners voted unanimously to approve the decision.

John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux falls Argus Leader.

## Noem pledges action to alleviate prescription drug shortages

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JULY 12, 2023 3:39 PM

SIoux FALLS — Governor Kristi Noem announced Wednesday the state will create additional stockpiles of prescription drugs to combat shortages.

The Department of Health already has an emergency stockpile of antibiotics in Sioux Falls and Rapid City. Noem is expanding that program to five additional cities – Aberdeen, Hot Springs, Mobridge, Pierre and Yankton. And in addition to the antibiotics currently stockpiled, the state is adding albuterol, epinephrine, insulin, prednisone, and pediatric amoxicillin.

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Noem shared the news during a press conference at a Lewis Drug pharmacy.

"We've never had a cache of medications stored in those communities," she said. "We will start doing that today."

After the press conference, South Dakota Searchlight asked the governor's spokesman how much it will cost to stockpile the additional drugs and how it will be funded. He deferred the question to the state Department of Health, which had not yet provided the information prior to this story's publication.

The governor is also sending letters to congressional leaders, South Dakota's congressional delegation, and the commissioner of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. The letters urge them to take action to address the national shortage.

Noem said the issue is personal for her.

"When my son, Booker, was growing up, he relied on the prescription drug albuterol on an almost daily basis," Noem said. "Without it, he would not have been able to breathe. Imagine my shock when I recently learned that a widespread and long-lasting shortage of this critical drug and others has been impacting America."

The U.S. is grappling with historic prescription drug shortages. Affected medications include those used for diabetes, chemotherapy, antibiotics, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and more. Drug shortages increased by nearly 30% between 2021 and 2022, according to a new Senate committee staff report. The report says about 80% of generic drugs come from outside the U.S. – primarily India and China.

In South Dakota, the shortages can get particularly bad in winter.

"The cupboards were bare at our pharmacies for months this last season," Melissa Magstadt, secretary of the state Department of Health, said during the press conference.

William Ladwig, a consultant pharmacist with Lewis Drug, also spoke. He said the shortage has multiple causes, including a global supply chain dependent on too few suppliers.

Additionally, he said pricing pressures drive up costs and discourage those few manufacturers from producing certain medications.

"The plastics and the shipping cost more than the drug, and that makes it difficult," Ladwig said.

Magstadt echoed the point.

"Manufacturing these cheap generics has not been fiscally sound in the U.S.," she said, "leaving the drug manufacturing work to be completed cheaply overseas."

Magstadt said when so many drugs are manufactured overseas, any disruption to that supply chain can cost lives.

Wednesday's press conference came after Noem signed an executive order on May 11. It required the Department of Health to investigate the shortage and issue a report with recommendations by June 12.

The new report's recommendations include the five new stockpile locations, as well as more analysis of the state's situation, informing the public, and putting pressure on the federal government to do more.

In her executive order, Noem pointed to an "overreliance on foreign sources for medications and their raw materials." The order said the vast majority of generic drug facilities are in China and India, leaving "South Dakota at China's mercy for vital health care supplies."

## Drugs joining the state's cache:

Albuterol is used to treat asthma and chronic breathing issues.

Epinephrine is used to treat severe allergic reactions.

Insulin is used to regulate blood sugars.

Prednisone is commonly used to treat inflammation.

Pediatric amoxicillin is used to treat bacterial infections in children.

*Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.*

## **U.S. Department of Agriculture to spend \$300M to boost climate data in farming, forestry**

**BY: JACOB FISCHLER - JULY 12, 2023 5:45 AM**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture will spend \$300 million to better measure the effectiveness of techniques to lower carbon emissions in farming and forestry, the department said Wednesday.

The funding comes from a \$20 billion allocation for climate-smart agriculture in the climate and social policy law Democrats in Congress passed along party lines and President Joe Biden signed last year.

It will be used to establish standards and reporting networks to give farmers and foresters better data to inform their climate practices, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said on a Tuesday call with reporters previewing the announcement.

Agriculture and forestry are key sectors in advancing Biden's climate agenda, Vilsack said. Biden has set a goal of reducing carbon emissions by at least 50% from 2005 levels by 2030.

"But to do that, we've got to get the science and innovation right," Vilsack, a former governor of Iowa, said. "We have to have accurate, reliable measurements of the impact and effect of the changes and the practices that we're embracing.

"We get those from constantly monitoring those practices and making sure that we're reporting them and verifying those results. That's going to allow us to know what works and, frankly, what doesn't."

About 10% of total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions in 2021 came from agriculture, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The department will establish a soil carbon monitoring and research network, create a greenhouse gas research network, expand data management infrastructure and improve models and other tools for measuring greenhouse gas outcomes, according to a USDA statement.

The agriculture sector already collects data and provides estimates on carbon emissions and sequestration, said Bill Hohenstein, the director of the USDA's Office of Energy and Environmental Policy. But existing data collection is done haphazardly, leaving some areas uncovered and others with only out-of-date information, he added.

The national networks will allow for sharing high-quality information, Vilsack said.

"This is going to put a finer point on our ability to collect information and data. It's going to allow us to better coordinate that information," Vilsack said. "It's going to allow us to accumulate more information from a variety of sources, not just what's happening on the ground."

More accurate data could also help make a stronger case for continuing to fund agriculture programs dedicated to climate solutions as lawmakers write a new farm bill this year, Vilsack said.

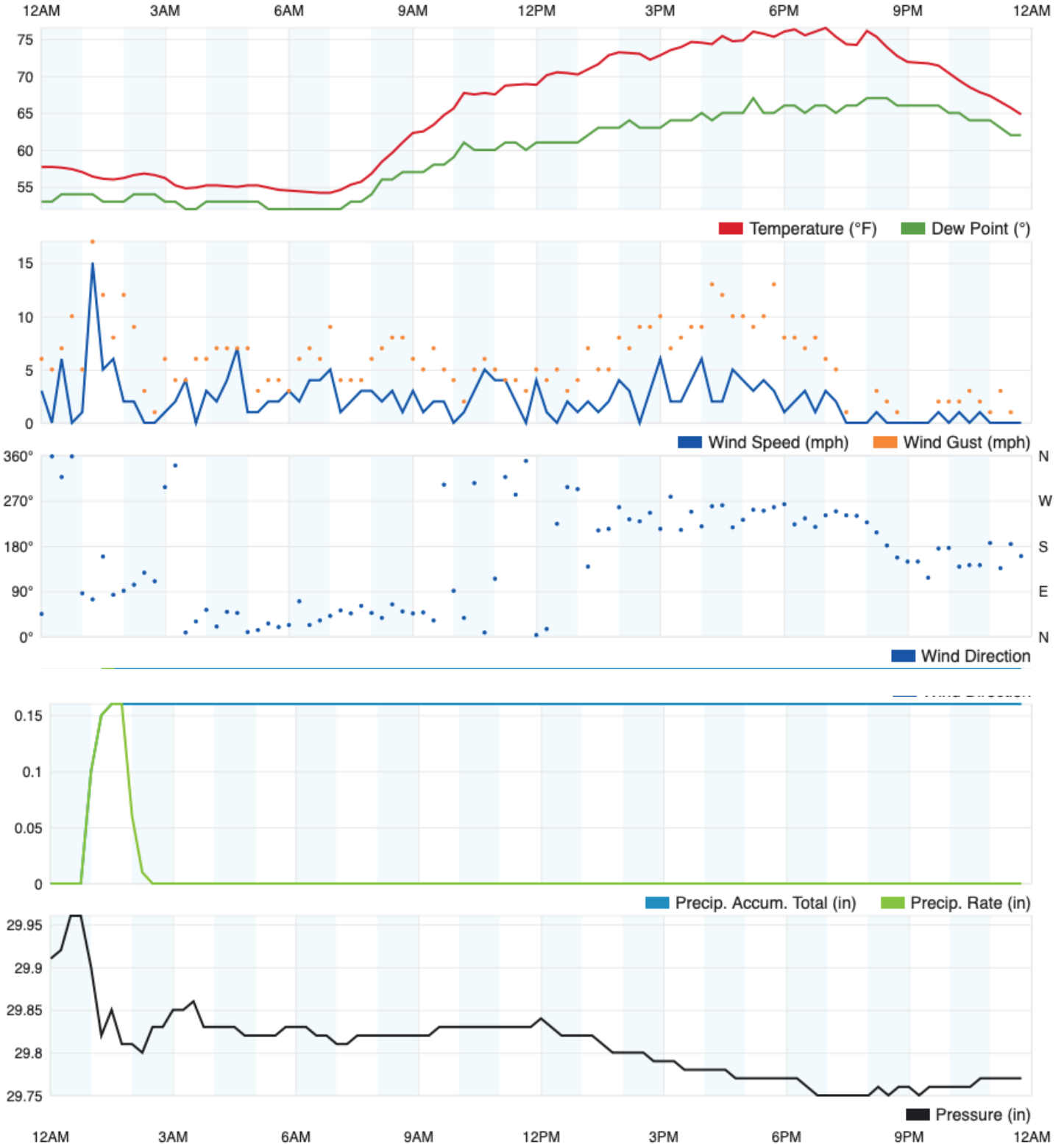
The spending is part of a larger federal strategy on greenhouse gas measurement and monitoring for agriculture and forestry that the Biden administration plans to introduce Wednesday, Vilsack said.

*Jacob covers federal policy as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Based in Oregon, he focuses on Western issues. His coverage areas include climate, energy development, public lands and infrastructure.*

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
						
Mostly Sunny	Slight Chance T-storms then Partly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Sunny then Sunny and Breezy	Mostly Clear and Breezy then Mostly Clear	Sunny
High: 88 °F	Low: 61 °F	High: 85 °F	Low: 58 °F	High: 80 °F	Low: 55 °F	High: 79 °F

## Warmer, Smokier, Then Cooler Weather Ahead

### Today, July 13th

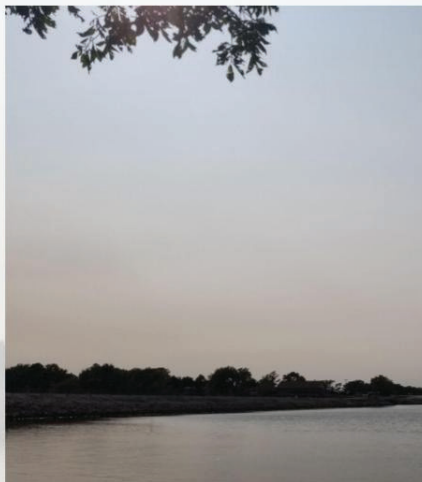
Sunny with highs warming into the 80s-Low 90s. Scattered Storms this afternoon & evening.



National Weather Service Aberdeen, South Dakota

### Friday, July 14th

Partly Sunny with highs in the 80s. Thickening milky white skies due to Canadian wildfire smoke.



### Saturday - Sunday

Mix of sun/clouds with highs in the 70s-mid 80s. Gusty northwest winds. Smoky skies persisting into Saturday



July 13, 2023

3:36 AM

Warmer temps along with sunny skies will give way to increasing clouds this afternoon. Widely scattered showers and storms will be possible this afternoon into this evening. A few storms could be strong to severe. Skies are expected to thicken with Canadian wildfire smoke on Friday. This could persist into the start of the weekend but a cold front pushing through on Saturday may scour some of it out. Cooler temperatures, gusty winds and mainly dry conditions are expected this weekend.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 77 °F at 6:18 PM

Low Temp: 54 °F at 6:41 AM

Wind: 17 mph at 1:13 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 26 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 106 in 1936

Record Low: 44 in 1987

Average High: 85

Average Low: 60

Average Precip in July.: 1.48

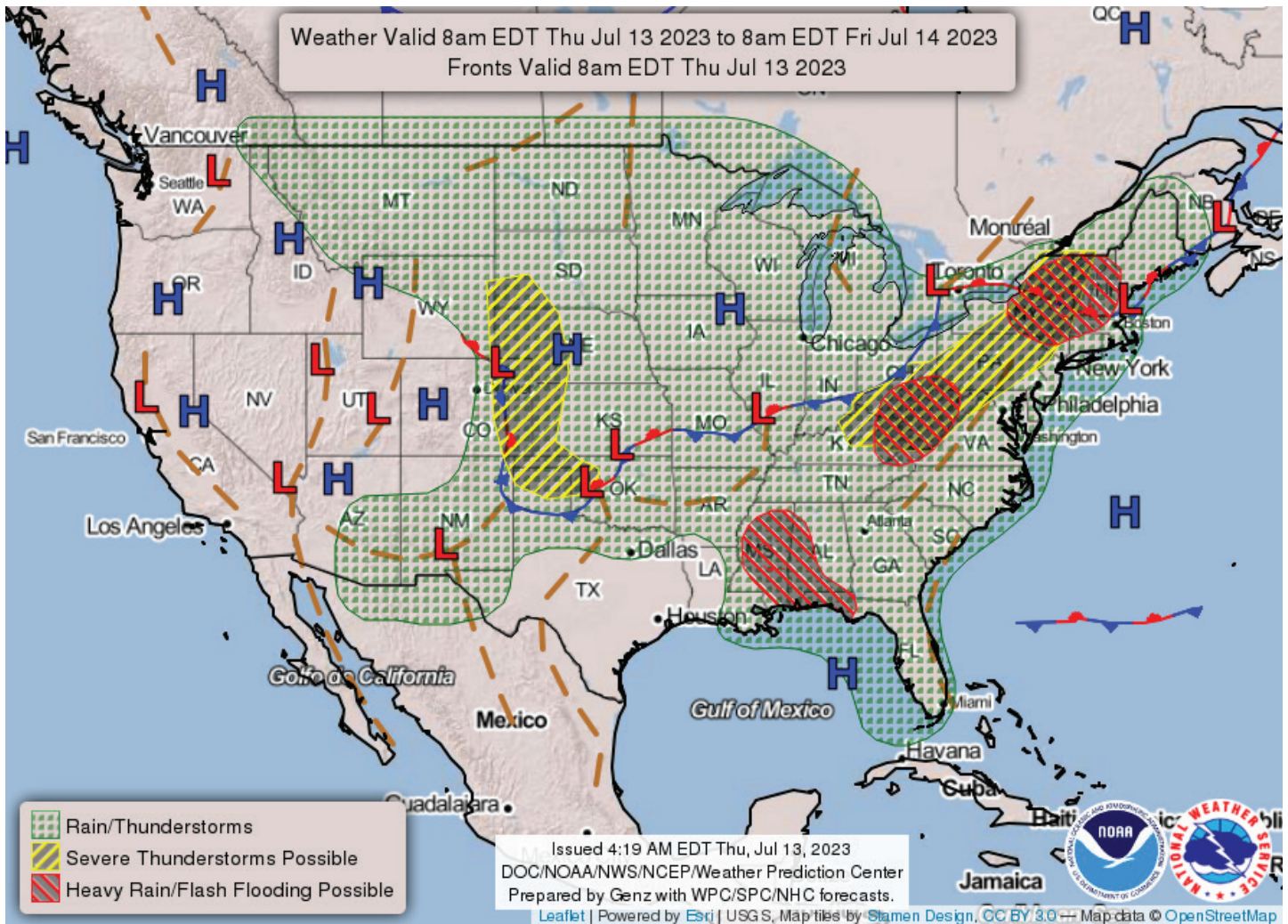
Precip to date in July.: 1.32

Average Precip to date: 12.49

Precip Year to Date: 12.67

Sunset Tonight: 9:21:22 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:55:55 AM



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## Today in Weather History

July 13, 1964: Early morning low temperatures dropped into the lower to mid-30s across the northern half of the state. Some low temperatures include 32 degrees at Castlewood, 33 in Andover and 4 miles NW of Onida.

1895: A tornado that began in Cherry Hill, New Jersey made its way to Woodhaven and Long Island in New York.

1951: Rivers across eastern Kansas crest well above flood stage, causing the most significant destruction from flooding in the Midwestern United States at that time. Five-hundred-thousand people were left homeless, and 24 people died in the disaster.

1895 - A tornado struck Cherry Hill in New Jersey causing fifty thousand dollars damage. It also descended into the Harlem and Woodhaven areas of New York City killing one person, and finally ended as a waterspout in Jamaica Bay. (David Ludlum)

1975 - Dover, DE, was deluged with 8.50 inches of rain to establish a 24 hour record for the state. (The Weather Channel)

1977 - Lightning struck a key electrical transmission line in Westchester County of southeastern New York State plunging New York City into darkness. (David Ludlum)

1980 - Afternoon highs of 108 degrees at Memphis, TN, 108 degrees at Macon, GA, and 105 degrees at Atlanta, GA, established all-time records for those three cities. The high of 110 degrees at Newington, GA, was just two degrees shy of the state record. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Unseasonably cool weather prevailed across the Midwest. Ten cities reported record low temperatures for the date, including Casper, WY, with a reading of 39 degrees. By way of contrast, record heat was reported in the eastern U.S., with highs of 93 degrees at Burlington, VT, and 101 degrees around Miami, FL. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - There were just three reports of severe weather across the country, and just one record high temperature reported. Thunderstorms brought much needed rains to the Tennessee Valley area, producing nine inches at Senatobia, MS. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - A thunderstorm at Albany, GA, produced 1.40 inches of rain in forty minutes, along with wind gusts to 82 mph. Afternoon highs of 98 degrees at Corpus Christi, TX, 110 degrees at Tucson, AZ, and 114 degrees at Phoenix, AZ, equalled records for the date. Greenwood, MS, reported 55.65 inches of precipitation for the year, twice the amount normally received by mid July. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)



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Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### USING OUR TALENTS

Years ago a Jewish immigrant from Russia gave his son a violin for his eighth birthday. After months of lessons and hours of practice, he became a very accomplished violinist.

Years later while performing at a concert, he paused and shared a funny story about an experience the day he was given his violin. The audience laughed heartily and applauded loudly. He was so delighted and encouraged by their response that he decided to end his career as a violinist and become a comedian. The violinist, who became a comedian, was the beloved Jack Benny. As a result of his decision, he brought humor and happiness, healing and hope to countless thousands with the special gift that God gave him.

God has something very unique for each of us to do. And, he wants to do through us what He will not and cannot do through anyone else. Each of us has a special place in God's heart and a different role for us to play in His world. Scripture plainly says, "To every man his work."

We often struggle and strain to discover what God has for us to do. But, if we are open to the nudging of His Spirit, take advantage of the opportunities that come our way, and use and develop the gifts He has given us, He will present many opportunities for us to serve Him, bless others, and complete the plan He has for our life.

Prayer: Lord, we ask that You guard us and guide us as we use Your gifts to honor You and serve others. Help us to find and follow the path You have planned for us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: The LORD says, "I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you." Psalm 32:8



We all need the encouragement, comfort, and peace that comes through God's grace. Our daily devotionals, known as Seeds of Hope, have been a means through which thousands of people have experienced this grace. Each devotional comes from God's Word and we pray this good "seed" finds good soil in your heart. Our aim is that the Seeds of Hope will be a great source of daily encouragement to you and that God will use them to draw you near to Him

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## 2023 Community Events

- 01/29/2023 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 01/29/2023 85th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
- 01/31/2023-02/03/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Drop Off 6-9pm, Community Center
- 02/04/2023-02/05/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Sale 1-5pm, Community Center
- 02/25/2023 Littles and Me, Art Making 10-11:30am, Wage Memorial Library
- 03/25/2023 Spring Vendor Fair, 10am-3pm, Community Center
- 04/01/2023 Dueling Duo Baseball/Softball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
- 04/06/2023 Groton Career Development Event
- 04/08/2023 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)
- 04/22/2023 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
- 04/23/2023 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)
- 05/06/2023 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
- 05/29/2023 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
- 06/16/2023 SDSU Alumni and Friends Golf Tournament
- 06/17/2023 Groton Triathlon
- 07/04/2023 Couples Firecracker Golf Tournament
- 07/09/2023 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
- 07/26/2023 GGA Burger Fundraiser Lunch at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 08/04/2023 Wine on Nine 6pm
- 08/11/2023 GHS Basketball Golf Tournament
- 09/09/2023 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
- 09/10/2023 Couples Sunflower Golf Tournament
- 10/14/2023 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
- 10/31/2023 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)
- 10/31/2023 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
- 11/23/2023 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)
- 12/02/2023 Tour of Homes & Holiday Party
- 12/09/2023 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9-11am

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.11.23

10 17 33 51 64 5

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$560,000,000**

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 6  
DRAW: Mins 58 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.12.23

3 5 18 22 36 3

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$5,790,000**

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 21  
DRAW: Mins 58 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.12.23

15 16 18 20 45 17

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT 15 Hrs 36 Mins 57  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.12.23

3 10 15 27 28

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$153,000**

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 36  
DRAW: Mins 57 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.12.23

42 49 54 62 63 21

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 5  
DRAW: Mins 57 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.12.23

23 35 45 66 67 20

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$875,000,000**

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 5  
DRAW: Mins 57 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

## News from the Associated Press

### **Solar storm on Thursday expected to make northern lights visible in limited US states**

By The Associated Press undefined

A solar storm forecast for Thursday is expected to give skygazers in some states along the U.S.-Canada border a faint glimpse of the northern lights which — at their peak — produce a colorful sky show when solar wind hits the atmosphere.

Northern lights, also known as aurora borealis, are most often seen in Alaska, Canada and Scandinavia, but an 11-year solar cycle that's expected to peak in 2024 has the potential to make the lights visible in places farther to the south. Three months ago, the light displays were visible in Arizona, marking the third severe geomagnetic storm since the current solar cycle began in 2019.

The Geophysical Institute at the University of Alaska Fairbanks has forecast auroral activity on Thursday, based on long-term outlook.

Auroral activity also has been forecast for Canada.

Those in small slices of the contiguous U.S. — including parts of Wisconsin, Michigan and Montana — could also get a peek. But for them, the aurora will probably be a "faint glow on the horizon" said Lt. Bryan Brasher, a project manager for NOAA's Space Weather Prediction Center.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Space Weather Prediction Center said people wanting to experience an aurora should get away from city lights and that the best viewing times are between 10 p.m. and 2 a.m. local time.

Northern lights occur when a magnetic solar wind slams into the Earth's magnetic field and causes atoms in the upper atmosphere to glow. The lights appear suddenly and the intensity varies.

\_\_\_ This story has been updated to correct the extent to which people can see the northern lights from the United States on Thursday, July 13, 2023.

### **Northern lights might be visible this week, but most of the US won't see them**

By MADDIE BURAKOFF AP Science Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The northern lights could put on a show this week — though the audience will be much smaller than some early forecasts had suggested.

The sky spectacle will be fairly typical: Stretches of Canada have a chance to spot the shimmering curtain of the aurora borealis, while a few in the U.S. could see a faint reddish glow on the horizon. Here's what to know about the updated predictions.

**WHO CAN SEE THE LIGHTS THIS WEEK?**

An early forecast by the University of Alaska Fairbanks Geophysical Institute, using data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, suggested that the northern lights could be visible much farther south than usual this week. But that forecast was based on long-term predictions about the solar activity responsible for the display. Forecasts using more current data from NOAA predict nothing special for the U.S.

"For the same reasons that it's hard to predict weather on Earth, it's hard to predict weather in space," said Northeastern University physicist Jonathan Blazek.

In North America, the predictions show a broad stretch of Canada and Alaska could see the northern lights overhead Wednesday and Thursday. Those in small slices of the contiguous U.S. — including parts of Wisconsin, Michigan and Montana — could also get a peek. But for them the aurora will probably be a "faint glow on the horizon," rather than a shimmering green curtain, said Lt. Bryan Brasher, a project manager for NOAA's Space Weather Prediction Center.

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For those in range, seeking out clear, dark skies between 9 p.m. and 3 a.m. will give the best chance to see the aurora's colorful glow.

## WHAT CAUSES THE NORTHERN LIGHTS?

The northern lights happen when particles from the sun make their way toward Earth and collide with our planet's atmosphere.

The sun is constantly sending material our way in a stream known as the solar wind. These particles carry an electric charge, and when they bump into gases such as oxygen and nitrogen in the Earth's atmosphere, they transfer some of their energy — "like two billiard balls hitting each other," Brasher said.

This puts the atoms and molecules in an excited state. They shake off some of that energy in the form of light, creating the colorful displays of greens, blues, pinks and reds.

This solar wind is always flowing, but its levels can vary.

"There are solar storms where you get more particles than usual. It's windier than usual," Blazek said. "There's also periods when it's fairly quiet."

It's during those periods of stronger solar wind activity when we tend to see more auroras, Blazek explained. More solar particles can make the northern lights brighter and also push them down toward the equator — giving people farther south a view.

Sometimes, the sun also shoots out huge amounts of plasma in what's known as a coronal mass ejection, Brasher said. If one of these outbursts hits Earth, even in a "glancing blow," it can disturb our planet's magnetic field and also cause shimmering auroras.

## HOW IS IT PREDICTED?

Scientists are constantly monitoring the sun using telescopes on Earth and in space in part because space weather can impact radio communications, satellites, power grids and more, Brasher said.

The sun spins on its axis once every 27 days. So, if scientists notice a spot with high activity, they might get a hint that it could come back around in a few weeks, he said.

But conditions can change by the time the sun makes a full rotation. Even then, there are so many factors at play that it can be hard to be sure about what's to come.

Generally, the sun's activity is "on the up-and-up" as we're heading toward a solar maximum in the next couple of years, Brasher said. So we may be seeing more solar storms soon — which will mean more northern lights.

"Everyone should stay tuned, because we probably have a lot more coming," Brasher said.

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The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Science and Educational Media Group. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

## Dangerous heat wave baking US Southwest brings triple digit temperatures and fire risk to California

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — After a historically wet winter and a cloudy spring, California's summer was in full swing Thursday as a heat wave that's been scorching much of the U.S. Southwest brings triple digit temperatures and an increased risk of wildfires.

Blistering conditions will build Friday and throughout the weekend in the central and southern parts of California, where many residents should prepare for the hottest weather of the year, the National Weather Service warned.

Midday highs were mostly expected to be above 100 degrees (37.7 C), and desert areas could reach 120 (48.8 C), forecasters said. Little relief was expected overnight, when temperatures could remain in the 80s (above 26.6 C). An excessive heat watch was in effect through Sunday for interior Los Angeles, Ventura, Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo counties.

"Please plan accordingly, this is not the time to be hiking or be outside for long durations," the weather service's LA office said on Twitter. "If you need to work outside, shift hours to the early morning, take frequent breaks and hydrate!"

Employers were reminded to adhere to regulations that require outdoor workers are given water, shade and regular breaks to cool off. The state will be performing spot checks at work sites to make sure the rules are being followed, said Jeff Killip with the Division of Occupational Safety & Health.

Across the U.S., more than 111 million people were under extreme heat advisories, watches and warnings, mostly in the Southwest, the National Weather Service reported Wednesday.

Forecasters said the long-duration heat wave is extremely dangerous, especially for elderly people, homeless residents and other vulnerable populations. The heat could persist into next week as a high pressure dome moves west from Texas. In Arizona, temperatures have hit 110 degrees (43.3 C) for more than a dozen consecutive days.

Horse racing events were canceled at the California State Fair near the state capital over concerns for animal safety.

Meanwhile, California's wildfire season was ramping up amid the hot, dry conditions with a series of blazes erupting across the state this week, said Secretary Wade Crowfoot of the Natural Resources Agency.

"As we get deeper into the summer and vegetation that grew up during the wet spring dries out, we are seeing an uptick in wildfire activity," Crowfoot said Wednesday during a state media briefing.

Crowfoot said global climate change was "supercharging" heat waves. California has instituted a \$400 million extreme heat action plan to protect workers, help vulnerable communities and assist local communities in opening cooling centers.

Officials said the state's power system, which was strained to the point of widespread blackouts in recent years, has been fortified and should be able to withstand the latest heat wave. The California Independent System Operator, which runs the electricity grid, said battery storage capacity reached 5,600 megawatts on July 1 — enough to power more than 3.8 million homes for up to four hours before recharging.

"The batteries being added to the grid are charged during the day, when solar power is abundant, and dispatched primarily in the evening hours when demand is still high and the sun is setting and solar capacity diminishing," Cal ISO said in a statement.

## **Black Lives Matter movement marks 10 years of activism and renews its call to defund the police**

By AARON MORRISON AP National Writer

The Black Lives Matter movement hits a milestone on Thursday, marking 10 years since its 2013 founding in response to the acquittal of the man who fatally shot 17-year-old Trayvon Martin.

Gunned down in a Florida gated community where his father lived in 2012, Martin was one of the earliest symbols of a movement that now wields influence in politics, law enforcement and broader conversations about racial progress in and outside the U.S.

BLM activists and organizations plan to mark a decade of the movement with in-person and virtual events. Calls to action include a renewed push to defund police departments and reinvest in Black communities that have suffered disproportionately from police brutality, unequal treatment in criminal justice systems and mass incarceration.

In the wake of Supreme Court decisions that stymied relief from student loan debt held disproportionately by Black borrowers and banned affirmative action in higher education, the need for BLM's existence couldn't be more clear, said prominent movement activist Melina Abdullah.

"What this movement moment means is that we have to absolutely redouble our efforts and redouble our commitment to making Black lives matter," said Abdullah, who is a director of BLM Grassroots Inc, a collective of organizers across the country.

"Ten years in, we're getting a glimpse at what would happen if there were no Black Lives Matter," she said. "We're not just going to fight when it's popular, but we're going to fight because we need to fight."

In Los Angeles on Saturday, the "#BLMTurns10 People's Justice Festival" will be held in Leimert Park, a historic neighborhood and cultural hub for Black Los Angelenos. The festival is designed to feel like a village and will include a pop-up garden dedicated to families of people killed by police and white supremacist

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violence.

Festival organizers have invited Sybrina Fulton, Martin's mother, to speak. Scholar and activist Dr. Cornel West, who is running for U.S. president as a third-party candidate in 2024, has been invited to give the festival's keynote address.

The BLM movement first emerged in 2013, after the acquittal of George Zimmerman, the neighborhood watch volunteer of mixed white and Hispanic heritage who killed Martin a year earlier. Zimmerman claimed to authorities that he acted in self-defense when he shot Martin. He also acknowledged to an emergency dispatcher that he had followed and profiled the Black teen as a potential burglar in the Sanford, Florida, gated community.

Martin's encounter with Zimmerman, as well as the delay in arresting and charging the gunman in the killing, raised questions about how police handle suspected acts of vigilantism against Black victims. In 2012, former President Barack Obama, the nation's first Black commander-in-chief, underscored public concerns over fairness in the case when he said: "If I had a son, he'd look like Trayvon."

On July 13, 2013, a Florida jury of six women, all but one of them white, found Zimmerman not guilty of second-degree murder or manslaughter. The immediate response to the verdict reverberated in Florida and across the U.S., energizing a new generation of Black racial justice groups including the Dream Defenders and BYP100.

BLM co-founders Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza and Ayo Tometi — the three activists are credited with using the phrase as an affirmation and an organizing strategy — initially pledged to build a decentralized organization governed by the consensus. The August 2014 shooting death of 18-year-old Michael Brown at the hands of police in Ferguson, Missouri, helped the phrase "Black lives matter" become a potent rallying cry for progressives and a favorite target of derision for law enforcement unions and political conservatives.

But just three years into its existence, all but one of the founders remained involved in the movement's burgeoning organization. And in 2020, an unprecedented wave of donations to the movement following protests over George Floyd's murder by Minneapolis police meant that BLM needed more infrastructure.

Amid disputes with grassroots activists about the direction of the movement organization, the Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation Inc. has been steward over a charitable endowment worth tens of millions of dollars. BLM Grassroots Inc. operates separately.

The foundation is marking the 10-year BLM anniversary with the launch of the campaign it's calling Defund the Police Week of Action. On Monday, it released a digital ad renewing 2020 rallying cries for defunding police departments. The organization is also encouraging supporters to ask local and national elected officials to introduce a draft proclamation that establishes July 13 as "Black Lives Matter Day."

"As we continue our push to defund the police, invest in Black communities and reimagine safety in our communities, we need our elected officials to focus on the people, not police," BLM foundation board member D'Zhane Parker said in a statement.

"The safest places around the world don't have more police, more jails, more prisons, or harsher sentences," she said. "They have better access to economic opportunities, quality education, stable housing, and health care."

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Aaron Morrison is a New York-based member of AP's Race and Ethnicity team. Follow him on Twitter: <https://www.twitter.com/aaronlmorison>.

## Tornado touches down near Chicago's O'Hare airport, disrupting hundreds of flights

CHICAGO (AP) — A tornado touched down near Chicago's O'Hare International Airport, prompting passengers to take shelter and disrupting hundreds of flights. There were no immediate reports of injuries.

A confirmed tornado was on the ground around 7 p.m. Wednesday, according to the National Weather Service in Chicago.

"This tornado has been touching the ground intermittently so far and is moving east. There are additional



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circulations along the line south of O'Hare. Seek shelter if in the warned area," it said.

By 8 p.m. the weather service said the Chicago forecast area was "currently tornado warning free." The storm moved into Michigan before passing through the state and into Canada early Thursday. Tornado watches that were in effect for parts of Michigan, Indiana and Ohio all expired.

Video from TV stations showed hundreds of people taking shelter in an O'Hare concourse. Some 173 flights departing the airport were canceled and more than 500 were delayed, according to the flight tracking service FlightAware.

Kevin Bargnes, director of communications for O'Hare and Chicago Midway International Airport, told WGN-TV Wednesday night that no damage was reported at either airport.

The National Weather Service had issued two tornado warnings for Chicago Wednesday evening. Tornado sirens sounded warning people to find shelter.

Lynn Becker, a longtime Chicago resident, posted video to Twitter with tornado sirens blaring across the city's iconic skyline.

"I'm in a 60 story apartment building so my options are somewhat limited," he said. "We have to, I assume, go into the core of the building."

Becker said news of the storm was featured across local media.

"There's a certain panic when you're watching a TV screen and everything is in red ... but the hope is that the damage is minimal," he said.

Local news outlets said warehouses were reportedly damaged near O'Hare.

The weather service quoted an unidentified emergency manager as saying a roof was blown off in the community of Huntley in McHenry County northwest of Chicago. Huntley Battalion Chief Mike Pierce told ABC-7-TV that firefighters and other emergency services were responding to downed power lines, trees and tree branches, and that power outages had been reported. Building damage appeared to be concentrated around two apartment buildings, he said.

More than 10,000 customers lost power in the region, according to poweroutage.us.

In Hodgkins, southwest of Chicago, police said storm damage and debris was found on the north end of town, near a shopping center.

Earlier Wednesday, the weather service's Storm Prediction Center had said there was an enhanced risk for severe weather, including tornadoes in northern Illinois, including Chicago.

Brett Borchardt, senior meteorologist with the National Weather Service, confirmed to WGN-TV that multiple tornadoes touched down across the Chicago area. He said surveying the damage will likely take days.

Over the years many tornadoes have struck in the Chicago metropolitan area, and several have hit within the city limits of Chicago, according to the National Weather Service. Between 1855 and 2021, the weather service recorded 97 significant tornadoes in the Chicago metro area.

The deadliest formed in Palos Hills in Cook County on April 21, 1967. The twister traveled 16 miles (26 kilometers) through Oak Lawn and the south side of Chicago, killing 33 people, injuring 500 and causing more than \$50 million in damage, according to the weather service.

## Ukraine repels large Russian missile and drone attack that injures civilians in Kyiv

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian officials said air defenses shot down 20 Iranian-made drones fired by Russia mostly at the Kyiv region early Thursday morning, but wreckage fell on four districts of the capital, wounding two people and destroying several homes.

The latest barrage by the Kremlin's forces began shortly after midnight, and explosions shook different parts of the city. Two people were hospitalized with shrapnel wounds, authorities said.

In the capital, rescuers extinguished a fire in a 16-story building, as well as in a non-residential building, the Interior Ministry said. Debris also damaged the frontage of a 25-story apartment building, it said.

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Russian strikes have become a grim part of everyday life in Ukraine over the almost 17 months of the war. Volodymyr Motus, a 22-year-old resident of the 25-story building, carefully picked his way across the floor a destroyed apartment, his footsteps accompanied by the sound of shattered glass. The mangled furniture was coated in a thick layer of dust.

"I was in my apartment and suddenly I heard a boom, that's all. Then the alarm went off and I went down to the shelter."

He said that some people were injured, but they were all alive.

In May, Russia launched dozens of drones and missiles at Kyiv almost every night, forcing its residents to spend their nights in shelters. During the summer, attacks came less frequently, but they still strike unpredictably across the country.

Ukraine's human rights chief Dmytro Lubinets wrote on Telegram, "It should be explained that each 'air alarm' in Ukraine is like playing Russian roulette... It's unknown the number of people who could be affected, and it is uncertain from which part of Ukraine bad news about the strike of an enemy drone or missile will come."

The Ukrainian military said it also intercepted two Russian cruise missiles. The statement said one ballistic missile was not intercepted, although it did not explain what damage the missile caused.

The government of the region of Khmelnytskyi in western Ukraine reported that a cruise missile was intercepted over the region, and reported no casualties. "We appreciate the meticulous work of Ukraine's air defense forces," the regional administration wrote on Telegram.

Recently, a Russian cruise missile struck an apartment building in the western city of Lviv, resulting in a death toll that reached 10, and leaving dozens injured. And in the southern and eastern regions of the country, where heavy fighting is taking place on front lines, the intensity of missile attacks has remained high since the beginning of the war.

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See AP's complete coverage of the war in Ukraine at <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine>.

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Associated Press journalist Felipe Dana in Kyiv contributed to this report.

## **No deal on Hollywood actors contract, strike vote will be held Thursday morning**

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The union representing film and television actors says no deal has been reached with studios and streaming services and its leadership will vote on whether to strike later Thursday.

The Screen Actors Guild -American Federation of Television and Radio Artists said early Thursday that its decision on whether to join already striking screenwriters will be considered by leadership at a meeting later Thursday.

If the actors go on strike, it will be the first time since 1960 that actors and writers picket film and television productions.

The actors' guild released a statement early Thursday announcing that its deadline for negotiations to conclude had ended without a contract. The statement came hours after this year's Emmy nominations, recognizing the best work on television, were announced.

"The companies have refused to meaningfully engage on some topics and on others completely stonewalled us. Until they do negotiate in good faith, we cannot begin to reach a deal," said Fran Drescher, the star of "The Nanny" who is now the actors' guild president.

The group representing the studios, the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers, said it was disappointed by the failure to reach a deal.

"This is the Union's choice, not ours. In doing so, it has dismissed our offer of historic pay and residual increases, substantially higher caps on pension and health contributions, audition protections, shortened series option periods, a groundbreaking AI proposal that protects actors' digital likenesses, and more," the AMPTP said in a statement.

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It added that instead of continuing to negotiate, "SAG-AFTRA has put us on a course that will deepen the financial hardship for thousands who depend on the industry for their livelihoods."

If the actors strike, they will formally join screenwriters on the picket lines outside studios and filming locations in a bid to get better terms from studios and streaming giants like Netflix and Amazon. The actors' guild has previously authorized a strike by a nearly 98% margin.

Members of the Writers Guild of America have been on strike since early May, slowing the production of film and television series on both coasts and in production centers like Atlanta.

Issues in negotiations include the unregulated use of artificial intelligence and the effects on residual pay brought on by the streaming ecosystem that has emerged in recent years.

Actors have joined writers on picket lines for weeks in solidarity. An actors' strike would prevent performers from working on sets or promoting their projects.

Whether the cast of Christopher Nolan's film "Oppenheimer" attends Thursday's London premiere hangs in the balance of whether the actors strike.

Attending a photo event on Wednesday, star Matt Damon said that while everyone was hoping a strike could be averted, many actors need a fair contract to survive.

"We ought to protect the people who are kind of on the margins," Damon told The Associated Press. "And 26,000 bucks a year is what you have to make to get your health insurance. And there are a lot of people whose residual payments are what carry them across that threshold. And if those residual payments dry up, so does their health care. And that's absolutely unacceptable. We can't have that. So, we got to figure out something that is fair."

The looming strike has cast a shadow over the upcoming 75th Emmys. Nominations were announced Wednesday, and the strike was on the mind of many nominees.

"People are standing up and saying, 'This doesn't really work, and people need to be paid fairly,'" Oscar-winner Jessica Chastain, who was nominated for her first Emmy Award on Wednesday for playing Tammy Wynette in "George & Tammy," told the AP. "It is very clear that there are certain streamers that have really kind of changed the way we work and the way that we have worked, and the contracts really haven't caught up to the innovation that's happened."

## Record monsoon rains have killed more than 100 people in northern India this week

By ASHOK SHARMA and RISHI LEKHI Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Schools and colleges were closed after record monsoon rains led to massive water-logging, road caves-in, collapsed homes and gridlocked traffic in large parts of northern India this week, killing more than 100 people, officials said Thursday.

At least 88 people died and more than 100 were injured in the worst hit-mountainous Himachal Pradesh state where cars, buses, bridges and houses were swept away by swirling flood waters, a state government statement said. The region is nearly 500 kilometers (310 miles) north of New Delhi.

Twelve people have died of rain-related incidents since Wednesday in Uttar Pradesh state, said Shishir Singh, a state government spokesman.

Nine of them drowned, two died after being struck by lightning and one was killed by a snake bite, Singh said.

One person died in New Delhi and four were killed in the Indian-controlled section of Kashmir, officials said.

Authorities used helicopters to rescue nearly 300 people, mostly tourists, who were stranded in the Chandertal area in Himachal Pradesh state since Saturday. They included seven sick people who were airlifted on Tuesday, the government said.

Nearly 170 houses have collapsed and another 600 were partially damaged by heavy rains and landslides in the state, the state emergency operation center said.

In New Delhi, residential areas close to the Jamuna River were flooded, submerging roads, cars and

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homes, leading to the evacuation of thousands of people from low-lying areas.

Dozens of cars were blocked by sheets of water, throwing the movement of vehicles into disarray during the morning rush hour in New Delhi on Thursday.

The water level of the Jamuna River flowing through the Indian capital topped a 40-year record and reached 207.71 meters (681.5 feet) on Wednesday evening, according to a statement by the office of New Delhi's top elected official, Arvind Kejriwal.

Authorities have moved nearly 30,000 people to relief camps and also converted some schools into relief camps in the badly hit areas, the statement said. Hundreds of people with their livestock also have taken shelter under overhead road bridges in the eastern parts of the Indian capital.

Rajesh Singh, a factory owner, was stuck with his motorbike for hours with floodwater blocking both sides of the road near the river bank. "I have never seen anything like this in the past 22 years."

"New Delhi hasn't seen a lot of rain in the past two days, but the river level has risen due to abnormally high levels of water discharge from Hathni Kund barrage in neighboring Haryana state," Kejriwal said.

India's weather agency has forecast more heavy rains in northern parts in the coming days. It said monsoon rains across the country have already brought about 2% more rainfall than normal.

India regularly witnesses severe floods during the monsoon season, which runs between June and September and brings most of South Asia's annual rainfall. The rains are crucial for rain-fed crops planted during the season but often cause extensive damage.

Scientists say monsoons are becoming more erratic because of climate change and global warming, leading to frequent landslides and flash floods in India's Himalayan north.

## Mass grave with at least 87 bodies found in West Darfur, United Nations says

By JACK JEFFERY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — The bodies of dozens of people allegedly killed by Sudanese paramilitary and allied militia have been uncovered in a mass grave in West Darfur, the United Nations said Thursday.

According to "credible information" obtained by the U.N. Human Rights Office, the bodies of the 87 people, some of whom belong to the ethnic African Masalit tribe, were dumped in a one-meter (around three-foot) shallow grave just outside the West Darfur city of Geneina.

The first 37 bodies were buried on June 20, the U.N. agency said in a statement from Geneva. The next day, another 50 bodies were dumped at the same site. Seven women and seven children were among those buried.

Sudan has been rocked by violence since April 15 when tensions between the military and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces erupted into open fighting.

Darfur has been at the epicentre of the 12-week conflict, morphing into ethnic violence with RSF troops and allied Arab militias attacking African ethnic groups.

The RSF and allied Arab militias rampaged through the western province, forcing hundreds of thousands to flee their homes, according to rights groups, with many crossing the border into neighbouring Chad. Amid the pillaging, entire towns and villages in the province of West Darfur have been burned to the ground and looted,

Darfur had been the scene of genocidal war in the early 2000s, when ethnic Africans rebelled, accusing the Arab-dominated government in Khartoum of discrimination. Former dictator Omar al-Bashir's government was accused of retaliating by arming local nomadic Arab tribes, known as Janjaweed, who targeted civilians.

Janjaweed fighters were folded into the RSF.

Jamey Keaten contributed to this report from Geneva.

## **Biden is closing out his Europe trip by showcasing new NATO member Finland**

By SEUNG MIN KIM, CHRIS MEGERIAN and JARI TANNER Associated Press

HELSINKI (AP) — President Joe Biden will close out his five-day trip to Europe on Thursday standing alongside Nordic leaders in an effort to show NATO's expanding power and influence against a burgeoning Russia.

The brief stop in the shoreline Finnish capital is the coda to a Biden tour that was carefully sketched to highlight the growth of the military alliance that the president says has fortified itself since the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Finland joined as NATO's newest member earlier this year, an entry that effectively doubled the alliance's border with Russia.

Biden arrived in Helsinki after what he deemed a successful annual NATO summit in Vilnius, Lithuania, where allies agreed to language that would further pave the way for Ukraine to join the military alliance. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called the summit's outcome "a significant security victory" for his country but nonetheless expressed disappointment Kyiv did not get an outright invitation to join NATO.

Biden and other administration officials also held what aides said were pivotal conversations with Ankara shortly before Turkey reversed course and dropped its objections to Sweden joining NATO.

"I'm feeling good about the trip," Biden told reporters shortly before boarding Air Force One for Finland. "You know, we accomplished every goal we set out to accomplish."

The president's trip this week — a meticulously choreographed endeavor meant to showcase international opposition to Russian leader Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine — played out nearly five years to the day since then-President Donald Trump infamously stood alongside Putin in Helsinki and cast doubt on his own intelligence apparatus. That was just days after Trump tore through a NATO summit where he disparaged the alliance and from which he threatened to withdraw the United States.

In contrast, Biden has heartily embraced the tenets of multilateralism that Trump shunned, speaking repeatedly of having to rebuild international coalitions after four tumultuous years led by his predecessor. The garrulous former Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman is in his element at summits abroad, and speaks of how his background in international policy is proof positive that decades of experience on the world stage has mattered for the presidency.

While in Finland, Biden will meet with the country's president, Sauli Niinistö, as well as leaders from other Nordic nations including Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland. Sweden is poised to join NATO as its 32nd member country after it pledged that it would cooperate more with Turkey on counterterrorism efforts while backing Ankara's bid to join the European Union.

It's the third such U.S.-Nordic leaders' joint meeting between a U.S. president and heads of the five Nordic nations. The previous summits were held in Stockholm in 2013 and in Washington in 2016.

The talks at the seaside Presidential Palace in the heart of Helsinki will focus on closer cooperation between the Nordic countries and the United States on security, environment and technology issues, Niinistö's office said. Biden is also scheduled to hold a press conference with Niinistö before departing for Washington.

Biden is the sixth U.S. president to visit Finland, a country of 5.5 million that has hosted several U.S.-Soviet and U.S.-Russia summits. The first involved former President Gerald Ford, who would sign the so-called Helsinki Accords with more than 30 other nations in 1975.

In the Cold War era, Finland acted as a neutral buffer between Moscow and Washington, and its leaders played a balancing act between the East and West, maintaining good relations with both superpowers.

Finland and neighboring Sweden gave up their traditional political neutrality by joining the European Union in 1995 but both remained militarily non-aligned, with opinion polls showing a clear majority of their citizens opposed to joining NATO. That changed quickly after Feb. 24, 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine.

Biden's visit follows Secretary of State Antony Blinken's trip to Finland in early June, when he said in a speech at the Helsinki City Hall that Finland's membership in NATO was "a sea change that would have been unthinkable a little more than a year earlier."

Among other things, Blinken and Finland's then-Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto signed a U.S.-Finland cooperation deal in advanced wireless communications including research and development of next-generation 6G network technology.

The deal is relevant not only to Finland, which is home to wireless technology and network infrastructure provider Nokia Corp. — a global leader in the field — but also to Washington, which is seemingly trying to contain China's ambitions to dominate the mobile network industry through Huawei and other Chinese technology companies.

## Former teen performers accuse an agent of sexual assault. They're hoping it's Japan's #MeToo moment

By YURI KAGEYAMA Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Kazuya Nakamura says he was 15 when one of the most powerful men in Japanese entertainment history forced him to have sex while he was part of a troupe of backup dancers managed by the legendary talent agent.

At least a dozen other men have come forward this year to say they were sexually assaulted as teenagers by boy band impresario Johnny Kitagawa, who died in 2019, beginning with three who spoke anonymously to the BBC for a documentary broadcast in March.

The story has all the elements of a major #MeToo reckoning, but in Japan, response has been muted.

While opposition politicians set up a committee in parliament to investigate, and the talent agency Kitagawa founded promised to do the same and offered a brief apology, the news still rarely makes the front pages or lead television news broadcasts.

Kitagawa shrugged off similar allegations for decades. National media almost completely ignored the story, and Kitagawa's business continued to thrive, even when a Tokyo appeals court found several accusers to be credible in a libel case in 2003. When Kitagawa died, he was honored with a massive funeral that filled a stadium.

Nakamura hopes that this time, Japanese society will acknowledge what happened to him.

"I just want to speak the truth," Nakamura said. "It happened."

The Associated Press does not usually identify people who say they were sexually assaulted, but Nakamura has chosen to identify himself in the media.

Kitagawa's agency, Johnny and Associates said in response to the AP's request for comment that all matters had been placed under investigation, and that it will also help with the "mental care" of those who come forward.

### ALLEGATIONS WERE LARGELY IGNORED FOR DECADES

In 1999, Japanese weekly magazine Shukan Bunshun wrote in a series of articles based on anonymous interviews with former performers that Kitagawa forced boys to have sex.

Kitagawa sued the magazine for libel in 2000, beginning a four-year legal battle that ended with an appeals court finding that "it was demonstrated that the sexual harassment was factual," and the testimony of the accusers, who appeared in court anonymously, was reliable.

In Japan, the imported phrase "sekuhara," short for "sexual harassment," is used to refer to all kinds of sexual misconduct.

However, the magazine was ordered to pay damages over assertions that Kitagawa gave minors cigarettes and alcohol.

Mainstream Japanese media almost completely ignored the story. No criminal charges were filed, and Kitagawa and his agency remained popular and powerful.

Toshio Takeshita, who teaches journalism at Meiji University in Tokyo, blames cozy relationships between corporate media and entertainment companies for the long silence. Access to stars is essential to media companies, so they're often afraid to cross powerful entertainment figures.

### NAKAMURA DESCRIBES A 2002 ASSAULT

Nakamura joined the Johnny's Jr. backup dancers in 2001, after his mother helped him apply.

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Johnny's Jr. is the first step on the ladder for many aspiring Japanese male performers, a barely paid training camp for dancers and singers. Hundreds of boys practice with the group every year, and the most successful are picked to perform alongside stars represented by Johnny's. A select few become stars themselves.

Nakamura said that on Oct. 19, 2002 — he remembers the exact date — he spent the night at Kitagawa's home after a performance at the Tokyo Dome stadium.

Kitagawa regularly invited dozens of boys to stay at his home, which had a swimming pool, and was stocked with snacks and video games, according to Nakamura and other accusers.

Nakamura said he was sleeping in a bed with two other Johnny's Jr. members, lying in the middle, when Kitagawa, then 70, forced him to have sex. He just closed his eyes and prayed it would be over. The other two boys kept quiet, sleeping or feigning sleep.

The following day, Nakamura said, Kitagawa handed him one or two 10,000 yen (\$125 at the time) bills. He refused, but Kitagawa squeezed the money into his hand.

He performed again that evening. "When you're on stage at the Tokyo Dome, the view of the penlights is so beautiful," he said. "It was still so beautiful, but I couldn't feel the joy."

He stopped going to the dance lessons.

For years, Nakamura felt ashamed and told only a few close friends and his mother.

He said that he decided to break his silence after another accuser came forward earlier this year. Kauan Okamoto alleged in a press conference at the Foreign Correspondents' Club in Tokyo that Kitagawa forced him to have sex repeatedly, a month after the BBC's documentary aired. Okamoto was the first person in decades to accuse Kitagawa without anonymity.

Okamoto said he was assaulted beginning in 2012, a decade after Nakamura. It made Nakamura regret not coming forward sooner.

He gave an interview to Shukan Bunshun in June, and was asked to speak to the committee in parliament later that month.

## FRUSTRATING APOLOGIES

In May, following a new series of public allegations and the start of a parliamentary investigation the new head of Johnny's apologized to fans in a YouTube video. Company President Julie Keiko Fujishima also hired former prosecutor Makoto Hayashi to head a three-person investigation.

Hayashi said that the company is not considering monetary compensation, but he said the investigation will move forward with the assumption the sexual assault took place.

But Nakamura said he couldn't reach the investigators.

He filled out a form on the company's website to take part in the investigation, he said, and was given a time for a phone call with an administrative assistant, which led to another call, and then an email about scheduling yet another, still not with Hayashi or his team. Nakamura gave up after two weeks of back and forth.

Hayashi declined to be interviewed for this story, and said he did not have a timeline for completing the investigation.

Nakamura said he was planning Japan's equivalent of a class action with several others. Details were still undecided, and the case's legal prospects are even more uncertain.

"This is not about winning or losing. It's important we raise our voices," he said.

## ACCUSERS HOPE RENEWED ATTENTION WILL CHANGE ATTITUDES

Kitagawa's accusers, and others, are hoping that more attention will lead to changes in Japanese society.

Japan has been criticized by the U.N. for not doing enough to protect children, amid widespread reports of corporal punishment, neglect and sexual abuse by adults, including parents and teachers.

A legal revision that officially banned violence against children kicked in only three years ago. Last month, Japan raised the age of sexual consent from 13 to 16.

Both Nakamura and Okamoto have testified in parliament, although the opposition, in charge of the investigation, is greatly outnumbered by the ruling coalition and has little power on its own to change

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center, which is protected as a UNESCO heritage site, as mayors of Italy's other art cities call for a nationwide law to manage the sector.

Elsewhere, the anti-mass tourism movements that were active before the pandemic have not reappeared, but the battle lines are still being drawn: graffiti misdirected tourists in Barcelona away from — instead of toward — the Gaudi-designed Park Guell.

Despite predictable pockets of overtourism, travel to and within Europe overall is still down 10% from 2019, according to the World Tourism Organization. That is partly due to fewer people visiting countries close to the war in Ukraine, including Lithuania, Finland, Moldova and Poland.

In addition, Chinese visitors have not fully returned, with flights from China and other Asia-Pacific countries down 45% from 2019, according to travel data company ForwardKeys.

Tourism-dependent Greece expects 30 million visitors this year, still shy of 2019's 34 million record. Still, the number of flights are up so far, and tourist hotspots are taking the brunt.

The Culture Ministry will introduce a new ticketing system for the Acropolis this month, providing hourly slots for visitors to even out crowds. But no remedy is being discussed for the parking line of cruise ships on the islands of Mykonos and Santorini on busy mornings.

Spain's tourism minister, Héctor Gómez, called it "a historic summer for tourism," with 8.2 million tourists arriving in May alone, breaking records for a second straight month. Still, some hotel groups say reservations slowed in the first weeks of summer, owing to the steep rise in prices for flights and rooms.

Costs are growing as flights from the U.S. to Europe are up 2% from 2019 levels, according to ForwardKeys.

"The rising appetite for long-haul travel from America is the continued result of the 'revenge travel' boom caused by the pandemic lockdowns," said Tim Hentschel, CEO of HotelPlanner, a booking site. "Big cities within these popular European countries are certainly going to be busy during the summer."

Americans have pushed arrivals in Italian bucket-list destinations like Rome, Florence, Venice and Capri above pre-pandemic levels, according to Italy's hotel association, Federalberghi.

They bring a lot of pent-up buying power: U.S. tourists in Italy spent 74% more in tax-free indulgences in the first three months of the year, compared with same period of 2019.

"Then there is the rest of Italy that lives from Italian and European tourism, and at the moment, it is still under 2019 levels," Federalberghi president Bernabo Bocca said.

He expects it will take another year for an across-the-board recovery. An economic slowdown discouraged German arrivals, while Italians "are less prone to spending this year," he said.

And wallets will be stretched. Lodging costs in Florence rose 53% over last year, while Venice saw a 25% increase and Rome a 21% hike, according to the Italian consumer group Codacons.

Even gelato will cost a premium 21% over last year, due to higher sugar and milk prices.

Perhaps nothing has encouraged the rise in tourism in key spots more than a surge in short-term apartment rentals. With hotel room numbers constant, Bocca of Federalberghi blames the surge for the huge crowds in Rome, inflating taxi lines and crowding crosswalks so that city buses cannot continue their routes.

In Rome and Florence, "walking down the street, out of every building door, emerges a tourist with a suitcase," he said.

While Florence's mayor is limiting the number of short-term rentals in the historic center to 8,000, no action has been taken in Venice. The canal-lined city counts 49,432 residents in its historic center and 49,272 tourist beds, nearly half of those being apartments available for short-term rental.

Inconveniences are "daily," said Giacomo Salerno, a researcher at Venice's Ca' Foscari University focusing on tourism.

It difficult to walk down streets clogged with visitors or take public water buses "saturated with tourists with their suitcases," he said.

Students cannot find affordable housing because owners prefer to cash in with vacation rentals. The dwindling number of residents means a dearth of services, including a lack of family doctors largely due to the high cost of living, driven up by tourist demand.



Venice has delayed plans to charge day-trippers a tax to enter the city, meant to curb arrivals. But activists like Salerno say that will do little to resolve the issue of a declining population and encroaching tourists, instead cementing Venice's fate as "an amusement park."

"It would be like saying the only use for the city is touristic," Salerno said.

AP reporters Aritz Parra in Rome, Derek Gatopoulos in Athens, Ciaran Gilles in Madrid, Angela Charlton in Paris and Kelvin Chan in London contributed.

## **Thailand's parliament is set to choose a prime minister, but it might not be the election winner**

By GRANT PECK Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Thai lawmakers are gathering Thursday to select a new prime minister, a process whose outcome is far from certain even though the country's most progressive party won both the popular vote and the most seats in the House of Representatives in the most recent election.

The reformist Move Forward Party's victory in the May 14 election appeared to spell an end to nine years of unpopular army-supported rule. Two months later, it is unclear if that mandate for change will be honored.

Parliament is due to vote on whether to make Move Forward's leader, 42-year-old businessman Pita Limjaroenrat, the country's prime minister. His party captured 151 of the 500 House seats and has assembled a coalition government-in-waiting. The eight parties in the coalition won 312 seats combined, a healthy majority.

But on Wednesday, the Election Commission said it concluded there was evidence that Pita had violated election law, and referred his case to the Constitutional Court for a ruling. If the court accepts the case and finds him guilty, he could lose his House seat, get kicked out of politics and face a prison sentence.

As Pita entered Parliament ahead of the vote on Thursday, he told reporters: "I will do my best to live up to the hope and support that the people have given me."

The more immediate roadblock to Pita taking power is that the prime minister is elected through a joint vote of the House and the 250-seat Senate, whose members were hand-picked by the military-backed regime established after a 2014 coup. Pita, or any other candidate, needs a minimum of 376 votes to become head of government, meaning he would probably have to shake loose a large number of votes from the Senate, many of whose members appear openly hostile to him.

The biggest hurdle between the liberals backing Move Forward and the deeply conservative Senate is the campaign pledge of Pita's party to amend a law that makes defaming the royal family punishable by three to 15 years in prison.

The monarchy is sacrosanct to members of Thailand's royalist establishment, and even minor reforms that might improve and modernize the monarchy's image are anathema to them. Move Forward's coalition partners also have not endorsed the proposed legal change, and other parties ruled out joining the coalition over the idea.

Chonlanan Srikaew, the leader of the coalition partner Pheu Thai Party, nominated Pita to start Thursday's proceedings, which include six hours of debate before an up-or-down vote for prime minister. If Pita does not get the required number, another round of voting is expected to be held next week.

If Pita cannot win over enough senators, his options appear nil. The options for the eight-party coalition as a whole appear more viable.

One option is for the Pheu Thai Party, which used to be the royalist establishment's top rival, to put forward one of its members as a candidate for prime minister. The party is closely affiliated with former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, a billionaire populist who was ousted in a 2006 military coup, in part because his popularity rubbed royalists the wrong way.

Thaksin-backed parties finished first in every election from 2001 until this past May but were blocked or forced from power each time. The 2014 coup seized power from a government that Thaksin's sister,

Yingluck Shinawatra, had formed.

Pheu Thai enrolled three of its members as potential prime minister candidates this year, including Thaksin's daughter, Paetongtarn Shinawatra. Real estate developer Srettha Thavisin, another of the trio, is considered more likely to have his name put forward if Pita isn't elected.

If the coalition cannot win enough support because Move Forward is a part of it, it could be dropped and other parties recruited to replace it. This could involve ceding the prime minister's seat to a newly enlisted coalition partner, such as the Bhumjaithai Party, which polled third in the May election and secured 71 House seats. The party's leader, Anutin Charnvirakul, was health minister in the outgoing government and has made no secret of his political ambitions.

If Pita and Move Forward somehow prevail — and it could take several votes over a period of weeks — their political survival still would sit on a knife's edge.

There have been fears that Thailand's conservative ruling establishment would use what its political opponents consider to be dirty tricks to cling to power. For a decade and a half, it has repeatedly utilized the courts and supposedly independent state agencies to issue questionable rulings to cripple or sink political opponents.

The alleged violation against Pita involves undeclared ownership of media company shares, which are banned for Thai lawmakers. Thitinan Pongsudhirak, a political scientist at Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University, describes the charges as "bogus," and says many people will be unwilling to accept them.

"It all depends on how far the royalist conservative establishment wants to go after Pita and prevent a democratic outcome," Thitinan said.

Michael Montesano, a Thai studies expert who is an associate senior fellow at Singapore's ISEAS-Yusuf Ishak Institute, said Thailand's political system should "move into closer correspondence with the realities of Thai society and with the aspirations of its younger, well educated members."

"The biggest question is whether this transition will be painful and even violent, or whether it will be constructive and thus serve the country's future prospects," he said.

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Associated Press writer Jintamas Saksornchai contributed to this report.

## Homeless World Cup makes US debut in California and scores victories beyond the field for players

By SOPHIE AUSTIN Associated Press/Report for America

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Lisa Wrightsman was a former college soccer player whose life was derailed by drug addiction before she eventually made her way back to the sport through a tournament for players from around the globe who have experienced homelessness.

Wrightsman qualified for the Homeless World Cup in Brazil. It was a competition that would forever change her life. When she returned to Sacramento, friends at the sober living facility where Wrightsman lived told her they wanted "to feel the way you look right now."

"I actually started to feel value," she said. "The whole tournament kind of instills you with that."

Wrightsman is now a coach for the U.S. women's team in the Homeless World Cup. The tournament made its U.S. debut July 8 in the capital of California, a state home to the largest homeless population in the country. It runs through Saturday.

The tournament is being held after a three-year hiatus due to the pandemic, when homeless populations surged in many U.S. cities. In Sacramento alone, it increased 68% between 2020 and 2022.

Thirty countries are competing in the games with teams that include people who have lived on the streets to refugees to foster children.

They include Yuli Pineda, who moved to California from Honduras and was living with a foster family when she joined. Pineda said she's found a sense of community playing for the U.S. team.

"Every single player comes from different backgrounds," Pineda, 18, said. "It's amazing that in a short

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amount of time we have connected that fast.”

One of the special parts about soccer is that it is so popular across the globe, said Lawrence Cann, founder of Street Soccer USA, which organizes the U.S. men’s and women’s teams.

“Imagine if you’re isolated, you feel some level of shame with everything that comes along with being homeless,” Cann said. “This gives you a natural way to connect to the largest community in the world, which is the soccer community.”

Mel Young, who co-founded the organization running the tournament, said the aim is to build players’ confidence to achieve their goals beyond the games. Some of the athletes have gone on to play professionally, but that’s not the point, Young said.

“The events are fantastic. I urge anyone to come and watch,” Young said. “But it’s about moving on. It’s about impact. It’s about people changing their lives.”

Young said he has witnessed the transformation. Years ago, Young said he got on a bus in his native Scotland and was surprised to find out the driver was a former player who competed in the tournament. He told Young he got his bus driving license after the games, was living in an apartment and engaged to be married.

Wrightsmen grew up in a Sacramento suburb and was a striker for California State University, Sacramento, also known as Sac State. She struggled with drug addiction and ended up in a sober living facility, which made her eligible to qualify for the Homeless World Cup. At the tournament in 2010, she remembered how much she loved playing, and it built her confidence knowing she could share her knowledge with players who were less experienced.

This year, players are battling dry, hot weather in Sacramento, with temperatures set to surpass 100 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius) by Friday. Some of the games were scheduled for later to avoid the most intense heat of the day.

The games are much shorter than traditional soccer matches, lasting only seven minutes each half, so anyone can participate. Each country can bring a men’s and women’s team. Women can compete on the men’s team if the country is not bringing a women’s team.

On a recent day at Sac State’s Hornet Stadium, players tried to cool down by sitting in the shade under bleachers and tents or by placing wet towels around their necks.

In the stands, spectators waved flags and sported jerseys and caps to show support for their country’s team. Supporters of the Mexican women’s team chanted “Si, se puede!” or “Yes, you can!” during a group stage match Tuesday as the reigning champions fought to win their eighth title.

For Sienna Jackson, a 24-year-old Sacramento native on the U.S. women’s team, playing soccer offered a welcome escape from stress growing up.

“It was something to get my mind off of my life and kind of calm me down,” said Jackson, who experienced homelessness for four years starting at the age of 19.

Jackson now lives in an apartment, works with a pediatric dentist and is studying dental assisting at Carrington College, a career-training school in Sacramento.

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Associated Press journalist Haven Daley contributed.

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Sophie Austin is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues. Follow Austin on Twitter: @sophieadanna.

## Influencer arrested over TikTok video satirizing wealthy Emiratis in Dubai shows limits on freedoms

By NICK EL HAJJ Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — An online influencer has been arrested in Dubai over a satirical TikTok video in which he portrays a brash Emirati on a spending spree inside a luxury car showroom.

The comedic sketch, in which he tosses stacks of bills at bewildered employees and offers to buy the most expensive car — a \$600,000 Ferrari SF90 — poked fun at the lavish lifestyles on display in the city, known for its gleaming skyscrapers and over-the-top tourism attractions.

Dubai is more socially lenient than much of the Middle East, with a relaxed dress code, bars and clubs serving alcohol — and even a local comedy scene. But vaguely worded laws forbid any speech, including journalism and satire, that is deemed critical of authorities or insulting to the United Arab Emirates, the federation of sheikhdoms that includes Dubai.

The influencer, Hamdan Al Rind, who refers to himself as the “Car Expert” online, is a UAE resident of Asian nationality. He boasts over 2.5 million followers on the popular video-sharing site TikTok. His latest video attracted millions of views and was widely shared before being taken down following his arrest.

In the video, he is wearing a kandura, the long white robe typically worn by Emirati men, sunglasses and a surgical mask. He speaks in English with a heavy Arabic accent, shouting clipped sentences at the dealership’s employees while his assistants haul around a stretcher filled with stacks of cash.

The Federal Prosecution for Combating Rumors and Cybercrimes says he is accused of “abusing the internet” by posting “propaganda that stirs up the public opinion and harms the public interest.” It said the video “promotes a wrong and offensive mental image of Emirati citizens and ridicules them,” the state-run WAM news agency reported on Sunday.

The WAM report described the video but did not identify the influencer or specify his nationality. It’s unclear when exactly Al Rind was arrested or what penalties he could face. It’s not known whether he has hired an attorney.

Just last month, a UAE resident of Arab nationality was sentenced to five years in prison and a \$136,000 fine for violating hate-speech laws by posting a video ranting against men and domestic workers. Prosecutors had ordered her arrest “in the context of the ‘buzz’ generated by the posting of the offending video,” WAM reported.

A vaguely-worded cybercrime law enacted in January 2022 heavily restricts expression and assembly, criminalizing virtually any form of political opposition and anything that could harm the reputation of the UAE or its leaders. Fifteen human rights groups have called for the law to be repealed or amended.

Ahmed Mansour, the owner of Luxury Super Car Rentals Dubai, where Al Rind filmed his video, said he thought the man was an Emirati citizen.

“He came in, he wanted to shoot a video, I said ‘yes.’ If it didn’t happen in my showroom, it probably would have happened somewhere else,” he told The Associated Press. “Some people thought it was offensive, some people thought it was funny, everyone has their own opinion.”

“I thought he understood the law,” Mansour added.

Al Rind, who operates his own car dealership in the UAE, has posted satirical videos before — including one that went viral in which he portrays a wealthy Emirati purchasing cars for each of his four wives — besides video tutorials on how to fix vehicles.

The UAE is home to some of the world’s wealthiest individuals, and Dubai boasts the world’s tallest skyscraper, a ski resort inside a shopping mall, and luxury neighborhoods built on man-made islands shaped like a palm tree and the world map. Dubai’s fleet of police cars includes a \$2.5 million Bugatti Veyron and a \$500,000 Lamborghini Aventador.

Emirati citizens, who are far outnumbered by expatriates, enjoy lavish cradle-to-grave social benefits funded by the country’s large petroleum reserves.

Some Emiratis have posted videos in recent years showing themselves making impromptu purchases of high-end cars and watches, riding thoroughbreds through the desert, and driving convertibles with

legislation.

Okamoto gathered more than 40,000 signatures on a petition to demand tougher laws to protect children, which he submitted to parliament last month.

Yoichi Kitamura, a lawyer who defended Shukan Bunshun in the libel lawsuit and is giving legal advice to Nakamura and other accusers, said the case could be a turning point in Japanese attitudes.

But he's been disappointed before.

During the trial, Kitamura said, "I felt: We got him."

Now, decades later, he's again helping Nakamura and others seek resolution.

Nakamura said that Kitagawa's accusers doubt that a moment like this will come again.

"We all feel that this is our last chance," he said.

Yuri Kageyama is on Twitter <https://twitter.com/yurikageyama>

## **Tourists are packing European hotspots. And Americans don't mind the higher prices and crowds**

By COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press

VENICE, Italy (AP) — Tourists are waiting more than two hours to visit the Acropolis in Athens. Taxi lines at Rome's main train station are running just as long. And so many visitors are concentrating around St. Mark's Square in Venice that crowds get backed up crossing bridges — even on weekdays.

After three years of pandemic limitations, tourism is expected to exceed 2019 records in some of Europe's most popular destinations this summer, from Barcelona and Rome, Athens and Venice to the scenic islands of Santorini in Greece, Capri in Italy and Mallorca in Spain.

While European tourists edged the industry toward recovery last year, the upswing this summer is led largely by Americans, boosted by a strong dollar and in some cases pandemic savings. Many arrive motivated by "revenge tourism" — so eager to explore again that they're undaunted by higher fares and hotel costs.

Lauren Gonzalez, 25, landed in Rome this week with four high school and college friends for a 16-day romp through the Italian capital, Florence and the seaside after three years of U.S. vacations. They aren't concerned about the high prices and the crowds.

"We kind of saved up, and we know this is a trip that is meaningful," said Gonzalez, who works at a marketing agency. "We are all in our mid-20s. It's a (moment of) change in our lives. ... This is something special. The crowds don't deter us. We live in Florida. We have all been to Disney World in the heat. We are all good."

Americans appear equally unperturbed by recent riots in Paris and other French cities. There was a small drop in flight bookings, but it was mainly for domestic travel.

"Some of my friends said, 'It's a little crazy there right now,' but we thought summer is really a good time for us to go, so we'll just take precautions," Joanne Titus, a 38-year-old from Maryland, said while strolling the iconic Champs-Elysees shopping boulevard.

The return of mass tourism is a boon to hotels and restaurants, which suffered under COVID-19 restrictions. But there is a downside, too, as pledges to rethink tourism to make it more sustainable have largely gone unheeded.

"The pandemic should have taught us a lesson," said Alessandra Priante, director of the regional department for Europe at the U.N. World Tourism Organization.

Instead, she said, the mindset "is about recuperating the cash. Everything is about revenue, about the here and now."

"We have to see what is going to happen in two or three years' time because the prices at the moment are unsustainable," she said.

The mayor of Florence is stopping new short-term apartment rentals from proliferating in the historic

cheetahs and lions in passenger seats.

But authorities are more sensitive to such portrayals by foreigners. Laws against hate speech and public incitement target anything seen as aggravating political, religious or ethnic differences in the intensely cosmopolitan country, which portrays itself as a beacon of tolerance and co-existence.

On Sunday, the Interior Ministry announced an investigation into another video featuring two men in a high-end sports car stranded on a desert road. The video shows a female Emirati police officer arriving at the scene and assisting them by sticking a gas pump into the ground and refilling their tank.

"In our country, no problem with gas," she says.

## **El Nino is threatening rice crops while grain supplies already are squeezed by the war in Ukraine**

By ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Warmer, drier weather because of an earlier than usual El Nino is expected to hamper rice production across Asia, hitting global food security in a world still reeling from the impacts of the war in Ukraine.

An El Nino is a natural, temporary and occasional warming of part of the Pacific that shifts global weather patterns, and climate change is making them stronger. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration announced this one in June, a month or two earlier than it usually does. This gives it time to grow. Scientists say there's a one in four chance it will expand to supersized levels.

That's bad news for rice farmers, particularly in Asia where 90% of the world's rice is grown and eaten, since a strong El Nino typically means less rainfall for the thirsty crop.

Past El Ninos have resulted in extreme weather, ranging from drought to floods.

There are already "alarm bells," said Abdullah Mamun, a research analyst at the International Food Policy Research Institute or IFPRI, pointing to rising rice prices due to shortfalls in production. The average price of 5% broken white rice in June in Thailand was about 16% higher than last year's average.

Global stocks have run low since last year, in part due to devastating floods in Pakistan, a major rice exporter. This year's El Nino may amplify other woes for rice-producing countries, such as reduced availability of fertilizer due to the war and some countries' export restrictions on rice. Myanmar, Cambodia and Nepal are particularly vulnerable, warned a recent report by research firm BMI.

"There is uncertainty over the horizon," Mamun said.

Recently, global average temperatures have hit record highs. Monsoon rains over India were lighter than usual by the end of June. Indonesian President Joko Widodo on Monday asked his ministers to anticipate a long dry season. And in the Philippines, authorities are carefully managing water to protect vulnerable areas.

Some countries are bracing for food shortages. Indonesia was among the worst hit by India's decision to restrict rice exports last year after less rain fell than expected and a historic heat wave scorched wheat, raising worries that domestic food prices would surge.

Last month, India said it would send over 1 million metric tons (1.1 million U.S. tons) to Indonesia, Senegal and Gambia to help them meet "their food security needs."

Fertilizer is another crucial variable. Last year China, a major producer, restricted exports to keep domestic prices in check after fertilizers were among exports affected by sanctions on Russian ally Belarus for human rights violations. Sanctions on Russia for its invasion of Ukraine don't specifically target fertilizers but the war has disrupted shipments of the three main chemical fertilizers: potash, phosphorus, and nitrogen.

Bangladesh found suppliers in Canada to make up for lost potash shipments from Belarus, but many countries are still scrambling to find new sources.

Farmers like Abu Bakar Siddique, who cultivates 1.2 hectares (3 acres) in northern Bangladesh, had enough fertilizer to keep his yields steady last year. But less rainfall meant he had to rely more on electric pumps for his winter harvest at a time of power shortages due to war-related shortfalls of diesel and coal.

"This increased my costs," he said.

Each El Nino is different, but historical trends suggest scarce rainfall in South and Southeast Asia will parch the soil, causing cascading effects in coming years, said Beau Damen, a natural resources officer with the Food and Agriculture Organization based in Bangkok, Thailand. Some countries, like Indonesia, may be more vulnerable in the early stages of the phenomenon, he said.

Kusnan, a farmer in Indonesia's East Java, said rice farmers there have tried to anticipate that by planting earlier so that when the El Nino hits, the rice might be ready for harvest and not needing so much water. Kusnan, who like many Indonesians uses only one name, said he hoped high yields last year would help offset any losses this year.

Indonesian President Joko Widodo has stressed the need to manage water well in the coming weeks, warning that various factors including export restrictions and fertilizer shortages could combine with the El Nino to "make this a particularly damaging event."

Baldev Singh, a 52-year-old farmer in northern India's Punjab state, is already worried. He typically sows rice from late June until mid-July, but then needs the monsoon rains to flood the paddies. Less than a tenth of the usual rainfall had come by early this month, and then floods ravaged northern India, battering young crops that had just been planted.

The government has encouraged Punjab farmers to grow rice along with their traditional wheat crops since the 1960s to improve India's food security, even though farmers like Singh don't typically eat rice and irrigation of rice fields has drained the area's aquifers. But he keeps growing it, counting on the certainty of government purchases at fixed prices.

With rain scarce, Singh may need to dig wells. Last year, he dug down 200 feet (60 meters) to find water. "Rice has been our ruin ... I don't know what will happen in the future," he said.

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Associated Press journalist Julhas Alam in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and Edna Tarigan in Jakarta, Indonesia, contributed.

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Associated Press climate and environmental coverage receives support from several private foundations. See more about AP's climate initiative here. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

## **The US House majority is in play next year after a weak GOP midterm showing and recent court ruling**

By JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. (AP) — Republican Rep. David Schweikert used to win his wealthy, suburban Phoenix congressional district by nearly 30 points. Then Donald Trump was elected president, and his victories started shrinking.

Schweikert, who won his last election by just 3,200 votes, is now among the top 2024 targets for Democrats, who sense better-than-expected odds of retaking the House majority they lost last year.

After an anemic showing in the midterms, Republicans have virtually no cushion in their quest to retain control of the House, which was made all the more complicated by a surprise U.S. Supreme Court decision last month that will likely bring two new safely Democratic districts. Democrats need to pick up just five seats to control the House.

Republicans are counting on a strong showing from incumbents like Schweikert, one of 18 GOP lawmakers representing districts that supported Democrat Joe Biden for president in 2020. Many are in upscale suburbs like Scottsdale that lean conservative but have rejected Trump and the party he now dominates.

In contrast, only five Democrats represent districts that Trump won.

"I've been Republican since JFK," said Roy Ross, a 74-year-old retired oil company manager who registered as an independent when he moved to Schweikert's district from Tennessee two years ago. "But the last two elections, I just said, 'I can't do that.'"

Still, he said, "I can't say that I'm hearing a lot from Democrats, either."

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Schweikert's fate in Arizona, and that of the GOP's House majority, will come down to the decisions of voters like Ross.

Other factors make for a volatile 2024 House landscape and point to terrain much more favorable to Democrats than what they faced in last year's midterms.

Trump is the early front-runner for the GOP presidential nomination, which could drive up turnout among his critics and force vulnerable Republicans to take uncomfortable positions. And abortion, which helped power Democratic victories in the midterms, remains salient a year after the conservative majority on the Supreme Court eliminated the constitutional right to terminate a pregnancy.

Democrats are already targeting key Republicans over abortion and looking to tie them to GOP figures like Trump who are unpopular with swing voters.

"Between overturning state-level protections for reproductive freedoms to prioritizing tax breaks for the wealthiest few and big corporations, vulnerable Republicans are signing their own pink slips ahead of next November's election," said Courtney Rice, a spokesperson for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, the House Democrats' campaign arm.

Republicans see plenty of reasons for optimism. Looking to expand the playing field beyond the 18 districts that voted for Biden, Republicans are targeting 37 other districts where they believe a Democratic incumbent is vulnerable.

Two Democrats from swing districts — Reps. Elissa Slotkin in Michigan and Katie Porter in California — are leaving their House seats to run for the Senate, improving the odds for Republicans who won't have to run against an incumbent. Biden's lackluster popularity could be a drain on his party, and prices for gas, food and housing remain high.

"Democrats are reminding voters why they took away the Democrats' gavels in the first place — extreme, unreasonable, and out of touch," said Rep. Richard Hudson, chair of the National Republican Congressional Committee, the GOP's House race arm. "Republicans are on offense, recruiting dynamic candidates and out-raising the Democrats, putting us in position to grow our majority."

After Trump's 2016 election, Schweikert's district started trending toward the center as some voters who historically backed Republicans reluctantly voted for Democrats or left their ballots blank. Redistricting ahead of the 2022 midterms accelerated the trend.

Schweikert eked out a victory of less than 1 percentage point last year against a relatively unknown rival who got minimal support from national Democrats. Neither party will be ignoring the district this time around. Democrats have already started attacking Schweikert over abortion.

The race has attracted interest from a crowded field of Democrats, with no obvious front-runner.

Schweikert has walked a fine line, managing to avoid associating too closely with Trump without jeopardizing his path to the GOP nomination. On abortion, he says he opposes it but believes it should be left to the states.

"The parties have changed," Schweikert said, describing the district's shifting voting patterns between conversations with doctors, entrepreneurs and a physicist at a neighborhood parade in Arcadia, one of Phoenix's most prestigious enclaves. "These people want me to fixate on their prosperity and not the eccentricities of the virus, the last election, those sorts of things."

The U.S. Supreme Court found last month that Alabama's congressional map violated the Voting Rights Act, a ruling that will require the state to create a second majority-Black district that strategists in both parties believe will be safely Democratic. Thanks to the ruling, a similar process is likely to play out in Louisiana, giving Democrats another safe seat.

In New York, Democrats are hopeful an ongoing lawsuit will allow them to draw new boundaries that tilt in their favor.

But Republicans have the advantage in North Carolina, where conservatives recently took the majority of the state Supreme Court and are expected to draw new maps that favor the GOP. The U.S. Supreme Court just reaffirmed the court's power to get involved.

Control of the House will largely come down to staunchly red or blue states that won't get much atten-



tion from presidential campaigns.

More than half of the 18 Republican-held districts that Biden won are in New York and California, two states that defied the midterm Democratic successes in much of the rest of the country. Most of the rest are scattered around the West — two in Arizona and one each in New Mexico and Oregon.

Strategists who work on House races believe several factors were behind Democrats' struggles in New York and California, states they usually dominate. They say voters there were uniquely drawn to Republican messaging targeting crime and homelessness and, as residents of states staunchly supportive of abortion rights, were less swayed by fears of losing access. Republicans still see crime and homelessness as potent issues, along with immigration.

"There are two public policy issues that look as though they could dominate next year's election, abortion and immigration," said Dan Schnur, a former Republican strategist who now teaches politics at three California universities. "Both of the parties are not only vulnerable on one of those issues but don't appear to have any clue as to how to deal with them."

## **Police say there's no sign of crime by BBC anchor who allegedly paid teen for sexual photos**

By BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — There's no evidence a BBC presenter who allegedly paid a teenager for sexually explicit photos committed a crime, London police said Wednesday as the broadcaster's wife publicly identified him for the first time as veteran news anchor Huw Edwards.

Metropolitan police decided to take no further action after speaking with the alleged victim and that person's parents. The parents told The Sun newspaper last week that the presenter had been allowed to remain on air after the mother complained to the BBC in May that he paid the youth 35,000 pounds (\$45,000) starting in 2020 when the person was 17.

As the story topped the news in Britain all week and embroiled the BBC in scandal, speculation swirled about the identify of the presenter. Some of the BBC's biggest on-air personalities publicly said it wasn't them and others called on the unnamed presenter to come forward.

Edward's wife, Vicky Flind, named her husband late Wednesday and said he was hospitalized with serious mental health issues.

After "five extremely difficult days for our family," Flind said she was naming him "primarily out of concern for his mental well-being and to protect our children."

"The events of the last few days have greatly worsened matters, he has suffered another serious episode and is now receiving in-patient hospital care where he'll stay for the foreseeable future," she said.

Edwards, 61, is one of Britain's best-known and most authoritative news broadcasters, lead anchor on the BBC's nighttime news and the face of its election coverage. He led BBC coverage of the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II in September. He's among the broadcaster's best-paid stars, with an annual salary of at least 435,000 pounds (\$565,000).

The father of five said in a 2021 documentary that depression had left him bedridden for periods over two decades.

The BBC said it would continue its investigation into the matter.

The U.K.'s publicly funded national broadcaster had scrambled to deal with the crisis after the claims were first published by The Sun over the weekend. It said it became aware of a complaint in May but "new allegations were put to us on Thursday of a different nature."

It did not name Edwards, but said it had suspended a male star over the allegations. He last appeared on air a week ago in Edinburgh for a special broadcast on Scottish celebrations of the coronation of King Charles III.

A lawyer representing the young person in question, who was not named, told the BBC earlier this week that "nothing inappropriate or unlawful has taken place between our client and the BBC personality." The lawyer said the allegations reported in The Sun were "rubbish."

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The tabloid defended its reporting, saying that concerned parents had made a complaint to the BBC that had not been acted on.

The Metropolitan Police issued a statement Wednesday saying no further action would be taken.

"Detectives from the Met's Specialist Crime Command have now concluded their assessment and have determined there is no information to indicate that a criminal offence has been committed," the force said.

Though the age of sexual consent in Britain is 16, it is a crime to make or possess indecent images of anyone under 18.

Jon Sopel, the former BBC News North America editor, sent his best wishes to Edwards and his family.

"This is an awful and shocking episode, where there was no criminality, but perhaps a complicated private life," Sopel tweeted. "That doesn't feel very private now. I hope that will give some cause to reflect."

The episode comes less than two months after commercial U.K. broadcaster ITV faced its own scandal when Phillip Schofield, a long-time host on the channel's popular morning show, quit in May, admitting he had lied about an affair with a much younger colleague.

The BBC has been hit by several scandals involving its stars over the years, most notoriously when longtime children's TV host Jimmy Savile was exposed after his death in 2011 as a pedophile who abused children and teens over several decades.

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Associated Press Writer Jill Lawless contributed to this report.

## Ukraine wins G7 security pledges, but NATO membership remains elusive

By CHRIS MEGERIAN, LORNE COOK and SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

VILNIUS, Lithuania (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy welcomed fresh pledges of weapons and ammunition to fight Russia's invasion along with longer-term security commitments from the West on Wednesday even as he expressed disappointment over the lack of a clear path for his country to join NATO as the alliance wrapped up its annual summit.

"The Ukrainian delegation is bringing home a significant security victory for the Ukraine, for our country, for our people, for our children," he said while flanked by U.S. President Joe Biden and other leaders from the Group of Seven most powerful democratic nations.

A joint declaration issued by the G7 lays the groundwork for each nation to negotiate agreements to help Ukraine bolster its military over the long term. Zelenskyy described the initiative as a bridge toward eventual NATO membership and a deterrent against Russia.

"We will not waver," Biden vowed after the summit in Lithuania ended. "I mean that. Our commitment to Ukraine will not weaken. We will stand for freedom today, tomorrow and for as long as it takes."

The Ukrainian and American presidents also met privately along with their advisers, and Biden acknowledged that Zelenskyy is sometimes "frustrated" by the pace of military assistance.

Zelenskyy thanked Biden, saying that "you spend this money for our lives," and said shipments of controversial cluster munitions would help Ukraine's fight against Russia.

It was a marked shift in tone from Zelenskyy's complaints a day earlier, when he said it was "unprecedented and absurd" to avoid setting a timeline for Ukraine to join NATO.

Biden said Zelenskyy now understands that whether his country is formally in NATO is "not relevant as long as he has commitments" such as security guarantees. "So he's not concerned about that now."

On the final day of NATO's summit, the alliance launched a new forum for deepening ties with Ukraine: the NATO-Ukraine Council. It's intended to serve as a permanent body where the alliance's 31 members and Ukraine can hold consultations and call for meetings in emergency situations.

The setting is part of NATO's effort to bring Ukraine as close as possible to the military alliance without actually joining it. On Tuesday, the leaders said in their communique summarizing the summit's conclusions that Ukraine can join "when allies agree and conditions are met."

"Today we meet as equals," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said at a news conference with

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Zelenskyy. "I look forward to the day we meet as allies."

The ambiguous plan for Ukraine's future membership reflects the challenges of reaching consensus among the alliance's current members while the war continues.

"The results of the summit are good, but if there were an invitation, that would be ideal," Zelenskyy said, through a translator. He added that joining NATO would be "a serious motivating factor for Ukrainian society" as it resists Russia.

"NATO needs us just as we need NATO," he said alongside Stoltenberg.

Ukraine's future membership was the most divisive and emotionally charged issue at this year's summit. In essence, Western countries are willing to keep sending weapons to help Ukraine do the job that NATO was designed to do — hold the line against a Russian invasion — but not allow Ukraine to join its ranks and benefit from its security during the war.

"We have to stay outside of this war but be able to support Ukraine. We managed that very delicate balancing act for the last 17 months. It's to the benefit of everyone that we maintain that balancing act," Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo said.

Symbols of support for Ukraine are common around Vilnius, where the country's blue-and-yellow flags hang from buildings and are pasted inside windows. One sign cursed Russian President Vladimir Putin. Another urged NATO leaders to "hurry up" their assistance for Ukraine.

However, there was caution inside the summit itself, especially from Biden, who has explicitly said he doesn't think Ukraine is ready to join NATO. There are concerns that the country's democracy is unstable and its corruption remains too deeply rooted.

Under Article 5 of the NATO charter, members are obligated to defend each other from attack, which could swiftly draw the U.S. and other nations into direct fighting with Russia.

Defining an end to hostilities is no easy task. Officials have declined to define the goal, which could suggest a negotiated cease-fire or Ukraine reclaiming all occupied territory. Either way, Putin would essentially have veto power over Ukraine's NATO membership by prolonging the conflict.

British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace warned Wednesday of bubbling frustration over Zelenskyy's demands, adding that "people want to see gratitude" for Western military support. Wallace also said he's heard "grumbles" from some U.S. lawmakers that "we're not Amazon."

"I mean, that's true," Wallace said, according to multiple British media outlets. He recalled telling the Ukrainians the same thing when he visited the country last year and was presented with a list of weapon requests. "I'm not Amazon."

At the same time, the new G7 framework would include long-term commitments to Ukraine's security.

To repel Russian attack, the major powers promise "swift and sustained security assistance, modern military equipment across land, sea and air domains, and economic assistance." They also vow to slap more sanctions on Russia.

For now and into the future, they say, they will provide weapons and military equipment, including combat air power, as well as more training for Ukraine's beleaguered army. Zelenskyy has asked that these assurances last at least until Ukraine joins NATO.

Moscow reacted harshly to the G7 plan.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said the summit cemented Ukraine's "role as the main expendable" in the "hybrid war" that it falsely claimed was "unleashed by NATO against Russia."

"Having embarked on an escalation course, they issued a new batch of promises to supply the Kyiv regime with more and more modern and long-range weapons in order to extend the conflict of attrition for as long as possible," the ministry said in a statement.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that "by providing security guarantees to Ukraine, they're infringing on Russia's security."

Ukraine has been let down by security guarantees in the past. In the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, Russia, the U.S. and U.K. agreed that "none of their weapons will ever be used against Ukraine except in self-defense" in exchange for Kyiv transferring its Soviet-era nuclear weapons to Russia.

But in 2014, Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula and seized territory in the south and east. In 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion in an attempt to topple Kyiv, leading to the current bloody conflict.

Zelenskyy told reporters that the Budapest Memorandum was no help without NATO membership and its mutual defense agreement.

"In fact, Ukraine was left with that document and defended itself alone," he said.

Although international summits are often tightly scripted, this one in Vilnius seesawed between conflict and compromise.

At first leaders appeared to be deadlocked over Sweden's bid for membership in the alliance. However, Turkey unexpectedly agreed to drop its objections on Monday, the night before the summit formally began.

Associated Press writers Karl Ritter and Liudas Dapkus in Vilnius, Lithuania; Joanna Kozłowska and Jill Lawless in London; and Darlene Superville in Washington contributed to this report.

## Top tribunal certifies Guatemala's election result minutes after another court suspends party

By SONIA PÉREZ D. Associated Press

GUATEMALA CITY (AP) — Guatemala's troubled presidential election was thrown into even greater turmoil Wednesday when the country's top electoral tribunal confirmed the results of the June 25 vote while the Attorney General's Office announced that the second place party had been suspended.

The seemingly contradictory moves fed more than two weeks of rising tensions and suspicions after the first round of voting, which had seemingly sent conservative Sandra Torres and progressive Bernardo Arévalo into a Aug. 20 presidential runoff.

There were immediate calls Wednesday for Guatemalans to take to the streets in protest and demonstrators gathered outside the Supreme Electoral Tribunal until heavy rain drove them away.

It was not immediately clear how the situation would play out now that yet another court had intervened in Guatemala's electoral process, but electoral authorities said Torres and Arévalo would face each other on Aug. 20.

But Rafael Curruchiche, the special prosecutor against impunity, said in a video statement that in May 2022 a citizen reported having his signature falsely added to the signature gathering effort of Arévalo's Seed Movement party and that the Attorney General Office's investigation also found 12 deceased people were included on its list of signatures.

The special prosecutor said there were indications that more than 5,000 signatures were illegally gathered for the party.

Curruchiche's statement was released while the country waited for a scheduled news conference by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal in which it was expected to certify the result of the June 25 election. The tribunal confirmed the result minutes after the prosecutor announced that the Seed Movement's legal status had been suspended.

Guatemala's electoral law prohibits the suspension of political parties between when an election is called and when it is held. With a second round of voting required because no candidate exceeded 50% of the vote, it appeared that the Seed Movement could not be suspended.

After the first round, losing parties had challenged the results and courts intervened to block certification of the results. Concerns grew that efforts were afoot to keep Arévalo out of contention.

This week, it appeared the demands imposed by the courts had finally been satisfied and electoral authorities said they were working toward certification of the results. But talk began to circulate on social platforms that another hurdle could be coming from the Attorney General's Office.

The relatively new Seed Movement party had needed at least 25,000 signatures to form itself legally. Curruchiche suggested that not knowing where the party got the funds to pay signature gatherers left open the possibility of money laundering.

The details of the case were made known to the Supreme Electoral Tribunal in May, Curruchiche said.

In 2021, the U.S. government said that it had lost confidence in Guatemala's commitment to battling corruption after Attorney General Consuelo Porras fired Curruchiche's predecessor. Last year, the U.S. State Department added Curruchiche to its list of corrupt and undemocratic actors, alleging that he obstructed corruption investigations.

Roberto Arzu, a conservative presidential hopeful who was barred from competing for allegedly starting his campaign prematurely, called on Guatemalans to take to the streets in protest following Curruchiche's announcement.

"This is a corrupt system's coup," said Arzu, son of former President Álvaro Arzú.

## **Indigenous women in Canada forcibly sterilized decades after other rich countries stopped**

By MARIA CHENG AP Medical Writer

TORONTO (AP) — Decades after many other rich countries stopped forcibly sterilizing Indigenous women, numerous activists, doctors, politicians and at least five class-action lawsuits say the practice has not ended in Canada.

A Senate report last year concluded "this horrific practice is not confined to the past, but clearly is continuing today." In May, a doctor was penalized for forcibly sterilizing an Indigenous woman in 2019.

Indigenous leaders say the country has yet to fully reckon with its troubled colonial past — or put a stop to a decades-long practice that is considered a type of genocide.

There are no solid estimates on how many women are still being sterilized against their will or without their knowledge, but Indigenous experts say they regularly hear complaints about it. Sen. Yvonne Boyer, whose office is collecting the limited data available, says at least 12,000 women have been affected since the 1970s.

"Whenever I speak to an Indigenous community, I am swamped with women telling me that forced sterilization happened to them," Boyer, who has Indigenous Metis heritage, told The Associated Press.

Medical authorities in Canada's Northwest Territories issued a series of punishments in May in what may be the first time a doctor has been sanctioned for forcibly sterilizing an Indigenous woman, according to documents obtained by the AP.

The case involves Dr. Andrew Kotaska, who performed an operation to relieve an Indigenous woman's abdominal pain in November 2019. He had her written consent to remove her right fallopian tube, but the patient, an Inuit woman, had not agreed to the removal of her left tube; losing both would leave her sterile.

Despite objections from other medical staff during the surgery, Kotaska took out both fallopian tubes.

The investigation concluded there was no medical justification for the sterilization, and Kotaska was found to have engaged in unprofessional conduct. Kotaska's "severe error in surgical judgment" was unethical, cost the patient the chance to have more children and could undermine trust in the medical system, investigators said.

The case was likely not exceptional.

Thousands of Indigenous Canadian women over the past seven decades were coercively sterilized, in line with eugenics legislation that deemed them inferior. In the U.S., forced sterilizations of Native American women mostly ended in the 1970s after new regulations were adopted requiring informed consent.

The Geneva Conventions describe forced sterilization as a type of genocide and crime against humanity and the Canadian government has condemned reports of forced sterilization elsewhere, including among Uyghur women in China.

In 2018, the U.N. Committee Against Torture told Canada it was concerned about persistent reports of forced sterilization, saying all allegations should be investigated and those found responsible held accountable.

In 2019, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau acknowledged that the murders and disappearances of Indigenous women across Canada amounted to "genocide," but activists say little has been done to address ingrained prejudices against the Indigenous, allowing forced sterilizations to continue.

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In a statement, the Canadian government told the AP it was aware of allegations that Indigenous women were forcibly sterilized and the matter is before the courts.

"Sterilization of women without their informed consent constitutes an assault and is a criminal offense," the government said.

"We recognize the pressing need to end this practice across Canada," it said, adding that it is working with provincial and territorial authorities, health agencies and Indigenous groups to eliminate systemic racism in the country's health systems.

Boyer, the senator collecting data on the issue, recalled once being approached by a tearful Indigenous woman describing her forced sterilization.

"It made my knees buckle to hear her story and to realize how common it was," Boyer said. "Nothing has changed legally or culturally in Canada to stop this."

Indigenous people comprise about 5% of Canada's nearly 40 million people, with the biggest populations residing in the north: Nunavut, Yukon and the Northwest Territories.

The more than 600 Indigenous communities, known as First Nations, face significant health challenges compared to other Canadians. Suicide rates among Indigenous youth are six times higher than their counterparts and the life expectancy of First Nations people is about 14 years less than other Canadians.

Until the 1990s, Indigenous people were mostly treated in racially segregated hospitals, where there were reports of rampant abuse.

It's difficult to say how common sterilization — with or without consent — happens. Canada's national health agency doesn't routinely collect sterilization data, including the ethnicity of patients or under what conditions it happens.

In 2019, Sylvia Tuckanow told the Senate committee investigating forced sterilizations about how she gave birth in a Saskatoon hospital in July 2001. She described being disoriented from medication and being tied to a bed as she cried.

"I could smell something burning," she said. "When the (doctor) was finished, he said, 'There: tied, cut and burnt. Nothing will get through that,'" Tuckanow said, referring to her singed fallopian tubes. She said she hadn't consented to the procedure.

The Senate committee's work was prompted by a previous 2016 investigation led by Sen. Boyer into about a dozen forced sterilizations of Indigenous women at a Saskatchewan hospital.

In November, a report documented nearly two dozen forced sterilizations in Quebec from 1980 to 2019, including one woman who said her doctor told her after bladder surgery that he had removed her uterus at the same time — without her consent.

The report concluded that doctors and nurses "insistently questioning whether a First Nations or Inuit mother wants to (be sterilized) after the birth of her first child seems to be an existing practice in Quebec."

Some women were not even aware they were sterilized.

Morningstar Mercredi, an Alberta-based Indigenous author, was sterilized as a 14-year-old, but didn't find out until decades later when she sought help after being unable to conceive.

"I went into a catatonic stage and had a nervous breakdown," Mercredi wrote in her 2021 book, "Sacred Bundles Unborn."

She told the AP the cost to First Nations peoples of coerced sterilizations was "staggering," noting the procedures were previously routine in Indigenous residential schools and hospitals.

"These many generations of Indigenous persons denied life is an effective genocide," she said.

The Senate report on forced sterilization made 13 recommendations, including compensating victims, measures to address systemic racism in health care and a formal apology.

In response to questions from the AP, the Canadian government said it has taken steps to try to stop forced sterilization, including investing more than 87 million Canadian dollars (\$65 million) to improve access to "culturally safe" health services, one-third of which supports Indigenous midwifery initiatives.

Last year, the government allocated 6.2 million Canadian dollars (\$4.7 million) to help survivors of forced

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sterilization. It said the Senate report was "further evidence of a broader need to eliminate racism" and acknowledged that bias in the health system "continues to have catastrophic effects on First Nations, Inuit and Metis communities."

Dr. Alike Lafontaine, the first Indigenous president of the Canadian Medical Association, recalls times in his own training when it was unclear whether Indigenous women had agreed to sterilization.

"In my residency, there were situations where we would do C-sections on patients and someone would lean over and say, 'So we'll also clip her (fallopian) tubes,'" he said. "It never crossed my mind whether these patients had an informed conversation" about sterilization, he said, adding he assumed that had happened before patients were on the operating table.

One problem, Lafontaine said, is that many First Nations women must fly hundreds of miles south to deliver their babies. "That happens because we literally did not build any health facilities where Indigenous people live," he said.

Gerri Sharpe, president of Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, said health centers serving Inuit women often aren't staffed by Indigenous people, resulting in translation problems. For example, in Inuit culture, people often communicate with facial expressions, like raising their eyebrows for "yes" or wrinkling their nose for "no."

"Doctors will be speaking, and they look to the woman to acknowledge something. When she (raises her eyebrows), the doctor labels it as 'non-responsive,'" Sharpe said.

Dr. Ewan Affleck, who made a 2021 film, "The Unforgotten," about the pervasive racism against Canada's Indigenous people, said the way forced sterilization happens now is more subtle than in the past. He noted an ongoing "power imbalance" in the country's health system. "If you have a white doctor saying to an Indigenous woman, 'You should be sterilized,' it may very likely happen," he said.

There are at least five class-action lawsuits against health, provincial and federal authorities involving forced sterilizations in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Quebec, British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario and elsewhere.

May Sarah Cardinal, the representative plaintiff in the Alberta case, said she was pressured into having her tubes tied after having her second child in 1977, but the doctor never explained the procedure was irreversible.

"The doctor told me: 'There are hard times ahead and how are you going to look after a bunch of kids? What if your husband leaves?'" Cardinal told the AP. "I was afraid if I didn't go through with it, they would be angry with me, and I didn't feel like I had a say."

Cardinal only realized she had been a victim of forced sterilization when her daughter, Anita, pieced it together after watching a video in a university class about eugenics and forced sterilization.

"My mother had always told me she wanted more children but that she didn't have a choice," Anita Cardinal said.

May Sarah Cardinal said she recalled her doctor asking if she and her husband were "native" Canadians and wondered why that should make a difference.

"I would see mothers with their kids and my heart ached not to be able to have more," she said.

Kotaska, the ob-gyn who carried out the surgery that left an Indigenous woman sterile in 2019, was the president of the Northwest Territories' medical association and held teaching positions at several Canadian universities.

Documents show an anesthetist and surgical nurse became alarmed when Kotaska said during the surgery to remove the woman's right fallopian tube: "Let's see if I can find a reason to take the left tube as well."

Kotaska told investigators he was "voicing his thought process out loud" that removing both tubes would lessen the woman's pelvic pain, the documents say.

Describing Kotaska's actions as "a violation of his ethical obligations," investigators suspended Kotaska's medical license for five months, ordered him to take an ethics course and reimburse the cost of the in-

quiry. The Northwest Territories health department said it was the first time a “non-consensual medical procedure” had been referred for investigation.

The woman is suing Kotaska and hospital authorities for 6 million Canadian dollars (\$4.38 million).

There was no suggestion in the documents that Kotaska was motivated by racism. Kotaska declined to comment to the AP.

The Canadian government would not comment on Kotaska’s actions but said forced sterilization is illegal and prosecutable under Canadian criminal law. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police in the Northwest Territories said there is no criminal investigation into Kotaska.

“People don’t want to believe things like this are happening in Canada, but cases like this explain why entire First Nations populations still feel unsafe,” said Dr. Unjali Malhotra, medical officer of the First Nations Health Authority in British Columbia.

Despite Canada’s reputation as a progressive society, its continued forced sterilization of Indigenous women puts it alongside countries like India and China, where the practice mostly affects women from ethnic minorities.

In Europe, forced sterilizations affected more than 90,000 Roma women in past decades in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Bulgaria. Court rulings, apologies from the governments, reparations programs and modified health policies have mostly stamped out the practice; the last known forced sterilization on the continent was in 2012.

In 1976, the U.S. found that forced sterilizations happened in at least one-third of the regions where the government provided health services to Native Americans. The U.S. government has never formally apologized or offered compensation.

Indigenous leaders in Canada say an official apology would be a critical step towards rebuilding the country’s fractured relationship with First Nations people. Only the province of Alberta has apologized and offered some compensation to those affected before 1972.

Mercredi said she continues to endure the repercussions of being sterilized without her knowledge decades ago.

“Those who subject women to this must be held accountable,” she said. “No amount of therapy or healing can reconcile the fact that my human right to have children was taken from me.”

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The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute’s Science and Educational Media Group. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

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This story has been corrected to show Dr. Unjali Malhotra’s title is medical officer, not chief medical officer.

## **Snow shovels in hand, volunteers help Vermont communities clear the mud from epic floods**

By LISA RATHKE Associated Press

ANDOVER, Vt. (AP) — Volunteers pulled out their snow shovels Wednesday to clear inches of mud after torrential rain and flooding inundated communities across Vermont, trapping people in homes, closing roadways and littering streets and businesses with debris.

The water drained off most streets in the state capital of Montpelier, where the swollen Winooski River flooded basements and ground floors, destroying merchandise and furniture across the picturesque downtown. Other communities cleaned up as well from historic floods that were more destructive than Tropical Storm Irene in many places. Dozens of roads remained closed, and thousands of homes and businesses are damaged.

But with people still being rescued, high water still blocking some roads and new flash flood warnings issued with more rain on the way, the crisis is far from over, according to state Public Safety Commissioner Jennifer Morrison.

“Vermonters, keep your guard up, and do not take chances,” she said.



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Morrison said urban search and swift water rescue teams came to the aid of at least 32 people and numerous animals Tuesday night in northern Vermont's Lamoille County, bringing the total to more than 200 rescues since Sunday, and more than 100 evacuations.

Volunteers turned out in droves to help flooded businesses in Montpelier, a city of 8,000, shoveling mud, cleaning, and moving damaged items outside. "We've had so much enthusiasm for support for businesses downtown that most of the businesses have had to turn folks away," said volunteer organizer Peter Walke.

Similar scenes played out in neighboring Barre and in Bridgewater, where the Ottauquechee River spilled its banks, and in Ludlow, where the Black River sent floodwaters surging into several restaurants co-owned by chef Andrew Molen. He said Sam's Steakhouse is likely closed for good after the water inside reached nearly 7 feet (more than 2 meters) high.

"The only thing that's probably gonna be salvageable is the silverware, and even then, after being in that muck for so long, you wash everything, do you really want to put that on the table? It's pretty intense what happened," Molen said.

Another of his restaurants, Mr. Darcy's, had a couple feet of water inside, damaging the foundation. But Molen said he hasn't focused on cleaning up yet, because the first order of business has been making sure local residents and first responders stay fed. His crew has been cooking at one of the restaurants that remains functional and using ATVs through standing water to bring the meals to a local community center.

Gov. Phil Scott toured the disaster areas with Deanne Criswell, administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, whose teams began aerial and on-the-ground damage assessments a day after President Joe Biden declared an emergency and authorized federal disaster relief.

The total cost of the damage could be substantial. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, even before these floods, this year has seen 12 confirmed weather/climate disaster events with losses exceeding \$1 billion in the United States.

"I think we all understand we are now living through the worst natural disaster to impact the state of Vermont since (the flood of) 1927," U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders said. "What we are looking at now are thousands of homes and businesses which have been damaged, sometimes severely. We're looking at roads and bridges, some of which have been wiped out and will need basic and fundamental repairs." The 1927 floods killed dozens of people and caused widespread destruction.

Scott said floodwaters surpassed levels seen during Tropical Storm Irene, which killed six people in Vermont in August 2011, washing homes off their foundations and damaging or destroying more than 200 bridges and 500 miles (805 kilometers) of highway.

Atmospheric scientists say destructive flooding events happen more frequently now because clouds carry more water as the atmosphere warms, and the planet's rising temperatures will only make it worse.

New York's Hudson River Valley also was hit hard, along with towns in southwest New Hampshire and western Massachusetts.

Massachusetts Gov. Maura Healey got a bird's eye view in a helicopter ride to the small town of Williamsburg on Wednesday, where roads were washed out and some people had to be rescued from their homes. Even after two days of receding waters, the Connecticut River retained a muddy brown hue and farmland along the river remains saturated, she said.

Much of that water was carrying debris including entire trees, boulders and even vehicles south through Connecticut to Long Island Sound. Major waterways including the Connecticut River overflowed their banks, and were expected to crest Wednesday at up to 6 feet (2 meters) above flood stage, closing roads and riverside parks in multiple cities.

By mid-day Wednesday, all the rivers in Vermont had crested and water levels were receding, although at least one was 20 feet (6 meters) above normal, said Peter Banacos, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service. Thunderstorms, gusty winds and hail were forecast for Thursday and Friday in Vermont, but Banacos said they'll blow through quickly enough that more flooding isn't likely.

One death was blamed on the storm — a woman whose body was found after she was swept away in Fort Montgomery, New York.

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About 12 Vermont communities, including the state capital, were under a boil water alert, but at least they were reachable again after being marooned by high water. The American Red Cross of Northern New England supported shelters in Rutland, White River Junction and Barre, where the city auditorium had 58 evacuees Wednesday morning, compared to more than 200 on Tuesday.

Many people were passing through to recharge their phones and get something to eat, said John Montes, regional disaster officer. Red Cross volunteers from across the Northeast were helping with disaster assessment and handing out clean-up kits to homeowners ahead of the next rains.

This flooding was catastrophic for Bear Pond Books, a 50-year-old store in Montpelier, said co-owner Claire Benedict. Water about 3 1/2 feet deep ruined many books and fixtures. Staffers and volunteers piled waterlogged books outside the back and front doors on Wednesday.

"The floor was completely covered with soaked books this morning," she said as they cleared out the mud. "It's a big old mess."

Ludlow Municipal Manager Brendan McNamara said his town also suffered catastrophic damage. The water treatment plant was out of commission, the main supermarket and roadway through town were closed, the Little League field and a new skate park were destroyed and he said he couldn't begin to estimate how many houses and businesses were damaged.

"We just really took the brunt of the storm," McNamara said. But he said his town will recover. "Ludlow will be fine. People are coming together and taking care of each other."

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Associated Press contributors include Kathy McCormack in Concord, New Hampshire; Pat Eaton-Robb in Hartford, Connecticut; Michael Hill in Albany, New York; and Mark Pratt, Michael Casey and Steve LeBlanc in Boston.

## Messi mania engulfs Miami ahead of Argentine soccer superstar's arrival

By GISELA SALOMON Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — A hamburger and drink combination called the Lionel Messi. A huge sketch of the soccer star's smiling face on a restaurant wall beside a viral meme from the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. A beer with a pink label matching the color of the Inter Miami jersey he will wear.

Wherever you turn in Miami these days something reminds you of the imminent arrival of the Argentine soccer legend.

There is no hiding the euphoria generated by Messi in Miami as he begins the new Major League Soccer phase of his career in one of the most Latino cities in the United States. But his arrival is also bringing a note of sadness as fans know that at age 36 he is nearing the end of his career.

Messi announced on June 7 that he will play for Inter Miami in a move that is expected to revitalize soccer in the United States and South Florida with one of the sporting world's best-known figures. More than 100,000 Argentines live in Miami, which will host World Cup matches in 2026.

The seven-time winner of the Ballon d'Or, the soccer world's most prestigious individual award, is coming off two years with Paris Saint-Germain and is expected to make his Inter Miami debut against Mexican team Cruz Azul on July 21.

In a career spanning more than 17 years with his country's national team, Messi has scored more than 100 goals, including two against France at the 2022 World Cup, a match Argentina won on penalties.

"I love that he's in Miami because my children will be able to experience him like I experienced (fellow Argentina soccer star Diego) Maradona," said Maximiliano Alvarez, one of the owners of the Fiorito restaurant, where a wall has a giant mural of Messi. "It also makes me sad, nostalgic, because it looks like it is the beginning of his retirement."

"Coming to this league is not the same as playing in the European league," said the Argentine businessman.

Alvarez and his brother Cristian had the original mural with Messi's face painted in the restaurant in 2018,

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when many people criticized the soccer star for his role in the Argentine national team's poor performance. His idea was to honor him and the resilience he brings, never giving up.

In 2021, they renovated the restaurant in Little Haiti in northeast Miami with another mural of Messi on the same wall, this one by Chilean-American artist Claudio Picasso.

On the walls of another restaurant called Kao Bar & Grill, in the Hallandale Beach area north of Miami Beach, Messi's meme "¡Andá pa' alla bobo!" "Go over there, fool!" is immortalized along with a giant drawing of the soccer star.

Angry after Argentina's heated victory over the Netherlands in the quarterfinals of the 2022 World Cup, Messi said those words to a Dutch player who was passing by while he was being interviewed.

Messi, who is known for his calm and cautious way of speaking, repented the comment, which immediately went viral.

"He regretted it, obviously ... but it was left as a joke," said Augusto Falopapas, the artist who drew the meme on the restaurant's wall.

To the south, in Wynwood district, an area near downtown Miami known for its warehouse-turned-art galleries, other artists have painted murals of Messi. One is two giant images of the player, one with a smiling face, the other another running as if in a game. And there are plans for more, including a 10-meter-high (32-foot-high) mural of Messi kissing the World Cup in an open parking lot.

Messi's arrival has also impacted breweries like Prison Pals Brewing Co., which sells a beer bearing Messi's number 10. The can is painted pink with black lettering, a replica of Inter Miami's colors.

The Argentine grill The Knife offers a Messi mojito and the Hard Rock Cafe is launching a new "Messi Chicken Sandwich" made from the soccer star's favorite "milanesas." Messi t-shirts, pants, sweatshirts with hood and water bottles will also be for sale.

"When we found out that he decided to choose Miami as his South Florida home, it was incredible for us," said Elena Alvarez, vice president of global sales for Hard Rock International. "We are very, very grateful and we have him as a brand ambassador and we are launching (the new sandwich) at the same time that he is moving here."

Near Miami Beach, at the Café Ragazzi of Argentine-Venezuelan singer-songwriter Ricardo Montaner, they are waiting for his return.

Messi was there on vacation after he won the America's Cup with Argentina in 2021. The star caused an uproar in the restaurant as fans came to greet him, forcing staff, including waiters and kitchen workers, to form a wall around him to protect him and allow him to exit to his car.

Now they want to offer the soccer legend more privacy and are thinking of putting up curtains.

"We are waiting for you in Miami with open arms," said Emiliano Valdés, the café's general manager. "He is revolutionizing the entire city and has not yet arrived."

## **Inflation drops to 3% and Biden hopes to turn a weakness with voters into a strength**

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The politics of inflation took a sharp turn Wednesday with a report showing consumer prices rose at the slowest pace since the early months of Joe Biden's presidency.

Republicans have hammered Biden over the cost of groceries, gasoline, utilities and more, saying his \$1.9 trillion pandemic relief package and push for electric vehicles were responsible for pushing inflation to a four-decade high. The GOP argument has resonated with voters, but the report on consumer prices for June suggests that inflation has eased dramatically without any of the job losses that some economists and Republican leaders said would occur.

Prices have risen just 3% from a year ago, compared with 9.1% in June 2022, and it's the lowest reading since March 2021.

Unlike a year ago, inflation is mainly coming from a government measure of shelter based on what it would cost to rent a home. This makes the inflation argument somewhat nuanced as data from AP Vote-

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Cast, a sweeping survey of the national electorate, shows that the majority of voters last year — 83% of Republicans and 73% of Democrats — own their homes and are largely insulated from higher rental prices.

Biden's team was quick to seize on the inflation report as proof that its policies are delivering results. Defying expectations that Federal Reserve efforts to combat inflation would cause layoffs, the unemployment rate is healthy at 3.6%.

"Inflation is down by two-thirds over the past year," said Jared Bernstein, chair of the White House Council of Economic Advisers. "It is particularly notable and highly consistent with Bidenomics to see this steep a decline in the rate of inflation while employment remains so uniquely strong."

The president was quick to take credit, with the White House issuing a statement from him: "Good jobs and lower costs: That's Bidenomics in action."

Sen. Rick Scott, R-Fla., said Biden was "delusional" for saying his policies are helping U.S. families.

"We've got to get this skyrocketing inflation and reckless spending under control and stop expecting our kids and grandkids to pay the bill," Scott said. "That's how we protect the American dream."

The office of House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., issued a statement saying that "Bidenomics continues to cost all Americans" because of higher prices since he took office. It called on the president to "join House Republican efforts to increase American energy production to drive down costs for hardworking families across the country."

Republicans are tweaking the data they use on inflation, putting a greater emphasis on total price increases over the entire Biden presidency instead of the annual and monthly figures that economists commonly use. The office of Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., issued a breakdown of price increases over the entirety of Biden's tenure to say that inflation is still a problem, citing a 39% increase in airfare, 18.8% increase in furniture prices and 52% increase in gas.

The administration wants voters to focus on the downward trend. One key statistic being measured by the White House is how many gallons of gas can be purchased on average for an hour of work. Republican lawmakers and candidates blasted Biden for record prices at the pump last year, a message that helped the GOP secure a House majority in 2022.

But by an internal White House analysis, this argument looks outdated: A single hour of work 12 months ago could only pay for 5.5 gallons of gas, a figure that has since risen to a bit more than 8 gallons. The increase appears to reflect a 27% drop in prices at the pump compared with a year ago, and also average wage gains of about 5%.

Biden has long denied that his \$1.9 trillion in COVID-19 relief money helped to spark inflation. Broken supply chains and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, he said, were the main culprits. This argument had limited appeal in last year's elections. AP VoteCast found that 54% of voters blamed Biden's politics for the higher inflation, while 46% said higher prices were due to factors outside his control.

Biden's aides largely attribute the decline in inflation to giving the Fed the independence to raise interest rates as needed and the unsnarling of supply chains and other efforts, such as last year's Inflation Reduction Act, that signaled the government would find ways to lower prices for prescription drugs and promote investments in clean energy and manufacturing.

The White House also feels reasonably positive about the path of inflation because housing is behind much of the current increase in prices. The government's measure of shelter inflation depends on rents, and a forecast by White House economists suggests home rental prices will ease in the months to come.

As the 2024 presidential election approaches, Biden has gone on the offensive about the economy, giving speeches that try to draw a link between his actions and new construction projects and investments by companies. The economy has been a vulnerability for Biden, with just 34% approving of his leadership on the issue in a June AP-NORC poll.

Still, the change in the composition of what is driving inflation could be critical for how voters think about prices and politics.

In 2022, VoteCast found that nearly all voters said inflation was at least a minor factor in their votes. That included 47% who said groceries and food costs were the most important element for them; the

majority of these voters backed Republicans.

An additional 16% said gas squeezed them the most, and about two-thirds of this group voted for the GOP. But of the voters who identified housing as their top inflationary burden, two-thirds supported Democrats.

Lael Brainard, director of the White House National Economic Council, told reporters last month that "there's every reason to think" inflation will be close to the Fed's 2% target by the November 2024 election.

Still, the progress does not mean inflation rates are automatically going downward and that the economy is guaranteed to escape a recession. White House officials acknowledged on Wednesday that the effort to bring down inflation is incomplete. The Fed is poised to raise rates and keep them high until inflation appears to be headed to the central bank's target.

Michael Strain, director of economic studies at the center-right American Enterprise Institute, said he is skeptical that demand in the economy "can weaken to the point that the Fed can credibly claim to have met its inflation target without the economy entering a mild recession and the unemployment rate increasing."

Skanda Amarnath, executive director of the advocacy group Employ America, said that the odds of a recession have decreased and that lowering inflation has not led automatically to large job losses as many expected. But he cautioned that there are still unknowns.

"When the Fed rapidly hikes, you don't know what stuff is going to break," Amarnath said.

## **The Manson 'family': A look at key players and victims in the cult leader's killings**

By ROBERT JABLON and JOHN ROGERS Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — In 1969, Charles Manson dispatched a group of disaffected young followers on a two-night killing rampage that terrorized Los Angeles. The killings remain etched in the American consciousness.

On Tuesday, Leslie Van Houten was released after spending more than 50 years in prison for two of those murders. She's the only one of Manson's followers who participated in the infamous Tate-LaBianca murders to go free.

Members of the Manson "family" arrived at the Hollywood Hills home of Sharon Tate on Aug. 8, 1969, where they stabbed, beat and shot to death the young actress and her friends — celebrity hairstylist Jay Sebring, coffee heiress Abigail Folger and aspiring screenwriter Wojciech Frykowski. As they made their way to the house, they encountered a teenager, Steven Parent, who had been visiting an acquaintance at the estate's guesthouse, and shot him to death.

The next night, Manson led a handful of followers, including Van Houten, to the home of wealthy grocer Leno LaBianca and his wife, Rosemary. Manson tied up the couple and left the others to kill them.

Manson and his followers also killed two others — musician Gary Hinman and Hollywood stuntman Donald "Shorty" Shea — in separate, unrelated attacks

In the decades since, some of Manson's followers have died while others remain behind bars.

### **THE KILLERS**

— Charles Manson was a petty criminal who had been in and out of jail since childhood when he re-invented himself in the late 1960s as a guru-philosopher. He targeted teenage runaways and other lost souls, particularly attractive young women he used and bartered to others for sex.

He sent them out to butcher LA's rich and famous in what prosecutors said was a bid to trigger a race war — an idea they say he got from a twisted reading of the Beatles' song "Helter Skelter."

Decades after his conviction, Manson would continue to taunt prosecutors, parole agents and others, sometimes denying any role in the killings and other times boasting of them. He told a 2012 parole hearing: "I have put five people in the grave. I am a very dangerous man."

He died in 2017 after spending nearly 50 years in prison. He was 83.

— Susan Atkins, convicted of the Tate, LaBianca and Hinman murders, was a teenage runaway working as a topless dancer in a San Francisco bar when she met Manson in 1967.

The Tate-LaBianca murders went unsolved for months until Atkins, who was in jail on unrelated charges,

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boasted to a cellmate about her involvement.

At trial, she testified she was "stoned on acid" and didn't know how many times she stabbed Tate as the actress begged for her life. Atkins, who became a born-again Christian in prison and denounced Manson, tearfully recounted that confrontation during a parole hearing years later.

She died in prison of cancer in 2009. She was 61.

— Leslie Van Houten, a former high school cheerleader and homecoming princess, saw her life spiral out of control at 14 following her parents' divorce.

She turned to drugs and became pregnant but said her mother forced her to abort the fetus and bury it in the family's backyard.

Van Houten met Manson at an old movie ranch on the outskirts of Los Angeles where he had established his so-called "family" of followers.

She didn't take part in the Tate killings but accompanied Manson and others to the LaBianca home the next night. She has described holding down Rosemary LaBianca with a pillowcase over her head as others stabbed LaBianca dozens of times. Then, ordered by Manson follower Charles "Tex" Watson to "do something," she said she picked up a knife and stabbed the woman more than a dozen times.

Van Houten, 73, earned bachelor's and master's degrees in counseling while in prison and led several prison programs to help rehabilitate fellow inmates. She was repeatedly recommended for parole, but two governors — first Jerry Brown and then Gavin Newsom — blocked her release.

However, she was finally freed after Newsom announced last week that he wouldn't pursue efforts to keep her behind bars.

— Patricia Krenwinkel was a 19-year-old secretary when she met Manson at a party. She left everything behind three days later to follow him, believing they had a budding romantic relationship.

After he became abusive and bartered her for sex, she said she twice tried to leave him but followers brought her back, kept a close watch on her and kept her high on drugs.

She testified at a 2016 parole hearing that she repeatedly stabbed Folger, then stabbed Leno LaBianca in the abdomen the following night and wrote "Helter Skelter," "Rise" and "Death to Pigs" on the walls with his blood.

Krenwinkel, 75, remains in prison. Krenwinkel contends she is a changed person but was denied parole more than a dozen times. She was finally recommended for parole last year but Newsom reversed the decision.

— Charles "Tex" Watson was a college dropout from Texas when he arrived in California in 1967 seeking "satisfaction through drugs, sex and rock 'n' roll," as he explains on his website.

He recalled meeting Manson at the house of Beach Boys drummer Dennis Wilson after seeing Wilson hitchhiking and giving him a ride home.

Watson, 77, led the killers to the Tate estate, shot to death Parent as he was attempting to leave and took part in the killings that night and the next at the LaBianca home.

He became a born-again Christian in prison and formed a prison ministry in 1980 that he continues to lead. Watson, who has authored or co-authored several books while in prison, maintains he has changed and is no longer a danger to anyone. He has repeatedly been denied parole.

## THE VICTIMS

— Sharon Tate, 26, was a model and rising film star after her breakout role in the 1966 film "Valley of the Dolls." She was 8 1/2 months pregnant when she was attacked, and she pleaded with her killers to spare her unborn son.

Tate's mother, Doris, became an advocate for victims' rights in California and was instrumental in a 1982 law that allows family members to testify about their losses at trials and parole hearings.

Her younger sister, Debra, also dedicated her life to victims' rights and testified at countless parole hearings for the killers, demanding they never be released.

Tate's husband, director Roman Polanski, was out of the country the night of the killings and has said it took him years to recover from the grief of losing his wife and baby.

— Jay Sebring, a hairdresser to Hollywood's stars, was Tate's former boyfriend and also begged the

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killers to spare her unborn child. He was shot, kicked in the face and stabbed multiple times.

Sebring had transformed the male haircare industry after graduating from beauty school in Los Angeles, and his clients included Warren Beatty, Steve McQueen, Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr. He founded Sebring International in 1967 to market hair products and to franchise his salons internationally.

— Wojciech Frykowski and Abigail Folger had dined with Tate and Sebring earlier that night.

The 32-year-old Frykowski was a friend of Polanski's from Poland and an aspiring screenwriter. An autopsy found he was stabbed more than 50 times and shot twice.

His 25-year-old girlfriend was the heir to the Folger coffee fortune. She managed to escape the house but was tackled on the front lawn and stabbed 28 times.

— Steven Parent, a recent high school graduate planning to attend college in the fall, had dropped by a guest house on the property to visit the estate's 19-year-old caretaker, a casual acquaintance named William Garretson. He was leaving the property when Watson confronted him at the front gate and shot him to death.

Garretson, who was briefly taken into custody, returned to his native Ohio soon after the killings. Except for his testimony during the murder trial, he rarely spoke publicly about that night. He died of cancer in 2016.

— Leno and Rosemary LaBianca, who owned a chain of Los Angeles grocery stores, had no connection to Sharon Tate or her glamorous friends.

Their home was chosen at random by Manson, who tied them up and then, before leaving, ordered his followers to kill them. Among the weapons used was a chrome-plated bayonet.

## OTHER PROMINENT PLAYERS

— Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme, 74, a Manson "family" member who was not implicated in the Tate-LaBianca murders, was sentenced to prison for pointing a handgun at President Gerald Ford in 1975. Since her release in 2009, she has lived quietly in upstate New York.

— Linda Kasabian, the trial's key witness, was granted immunity from prosecution. She had accompanied the killers to the Tate house but was posted outside as a lookout. In that position she said she saw some of the killings.

The next night she remained in a car outside the LaBianca house as Manson tied up the victims, then left with him as the others stayed to kill them.

The 20-year-old moved in with the "family" a few weeks before the killings and fled immediately after. She turned herself in to authorities after the others were arrested. Kasabian later changed her name and lived out of sight for decades. She died on Jan. 21 in Tacoma, Washington. She was 73.

— Bruce Davis, 80, was convicted of taking part in the Hinman and Shea murders but was not involved in the Tate-LaBianca killings.

He testified at his 2014 parole hearing that he attacked Shea with a knife and held a gun on Hinman while Manson cut Hinman's face with a sword. "I wanted to be Charlie's favorite guy," he said. Parole panels have repeatedly recommended his release, but governors have blocked it.

— Steve "Clem" Grogan, 71, once a ranch hand at the old movie ranch where Manson had located his followers, was sentenced to life in prison for taking part in Shea's murder. In 1977 he told authorities where Shea's body was buried.

Grogan was paroled in 1985 and moved to northern California.

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John Rogers retired from The Associated Press in 2021.

## 3 dead, 14 hurt after Greyhound bus strikes semis in Illinois; NTSB investigating

By The Associated Press undefined

HIGHLAND, Ill. (AP) — A Greyhound passenger bus crashed into three tractor-trailers parked along a highway rest area exit early Wednesday in southern Illinois, killing three people and injuring 14 others, some seriously, state police said.

The St. Louis-bound bus was traveling westbound along Interstate 70 in Madison County when it crashed into the three semis just before 2 a.m., Illinois State Police said, citing an initial investigation.

Four people were taken to the hospital by helicopter and at least 10 others were taken by ambulance, state police said in a news release. Police did not immediately release details about those who were injured and killed.

No one in the three trucks was hurt in the crash near the city of Highland, about 25 miles (40 kilometers) east of St. Louis, police said.

State Police spokesperson Melaney Arnold said those killed and injured were all on the bus.

Amalgamated Transit Union, which represents Greyhound drivers, said in a Facebook post that the driver was in serious condition at a hospital.

The crash closed westbound traffic on I-70.

A team from the National Transportation Safety Board arrived at the scene Wednesday. U.S. Rep. Mike Bost, an Illinois Republican, said an NTSB official told him the bus was equipped with monitoring cameras "so they'll be able to do a full check to see how the accident occurred."

Photos and video from the scene showed the side of the bus peeled open and its roof crumpled. A second tractor-trailer appears to have made contact with the right rear of the bus while a third tractor-trailer appears to have crashed into the rear of that second semi.

Passenger Edward Alexander of Pine Bluff, Arkansas, told the St. Louis Post-Dispatch he helped a pregnant woman get off the bus and was searching for his phone when he "realized smoke was coming in the bus. I was like, 'forget that phone,' and went on and jumped out the window."

Edwin Brown, 22, of Friars Point, Mississippi, told the Post-Dispatch that he felt the bus shake as it passed over rumble strips before the side of the vehicle "opened up like a can opener." The driver was in and out of consciousness as Brown turned the ignition off with the help of a trucker, he said.

Greyhound spokesperson Mike Ogulnick said in an email that the bus was traveling from Indianapolis to St. Louis with a scheduled arrival of 2:20 a.m. About 30 people were on board.

"Our primary concern is ensuring we care for our passengers and driver at this time," Ogulnick said. "We are working closely with local authorities, and a relief bus is on the way for passengers."

It is illegal in Illinois for trucks to park on exit ramps. But trucking industry experts say semis often stop there for the night because overnight parking is hard to find at rest areas and other places such as truck stops.

"And that's not only dangerous for them but it's dangerous for the motoring public because they do need their rest and they deserve their rest," Lewis Pugh of the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association said at a May hearing before a House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure subcommittee.

Tom Chapman, an NTSB board member, declined to discuss specifics of the crash during a briefing Wednesday, including the reports that the rigs were stopped along the ramp.

"Rest area safety is one of the issues that will be a part of this investigation," he said. "Again, we don't know enough to be able to say with certainty that that's what occurred, but that's certainly one of the issues that we'll be looking at as part of our investigation."

The findings of the inquiry could lead to recommendations designed to "help ensure that similar tragedies not occur in the future," he added. Another briefing was planned for Thursday.

Last month the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration announced that it will require trucks and buses to include automatic emergency braking equipment within five years. AEBs use forward-facing cameras and sensor technologies to detect when a crash is imminent.



The system automatically applies the brakes if the driver has not done so, or, if needed, applies additional braking force to supplement the driver's actions. The proposed standard would require the technology to work at speeds ranging from 6 to 50 mph (10 to 80 kph).

Associated Press writers Jim Salter in St. Louis, Tom Krisher in Detroit, Kathleen Foody in Chicago and Heather Hollingsworth in Mission, Kansas, contributed to this report.

## Hollywood actors agree to mediation, but strike may be unavoidable

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Unionized Hollywood actors on the verge of a strike have agreed to allow a last-minute intervention from federal mediators but say they doubt a deal will be reached by a negotiation deadline late Wednesday.

"We are committed to the negotiating process and will explore and exhaust every possible opportunity to make a deal, however we are not confident that the employers have any intention of bargaining toward an agreement," the Screen Actors Guild -American Federation of Radio and Television Artists said in a statement Tuesday night.

The actors could join the already striking Writers Guild of America and grind the already slowed production process to a halt if no agreement is reached with the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers. The sides agreed to an extension before the original contract expiration date on June 30, resetting it to Wednesday at 11:59 p.m.

Issues on the table in negotiations include the unregulated use of artificial intelligence and effects on residual pay brought on by the streaming ecosystem that has emerged in recent years.

"People are standing up and saying this doesn't really work, and people need to be paid fairly," Oscar-winner Jessica Chastain, who was nominated for her first Emmy Award Wednesday for playing Tammy Wynette in "George & Tammy," told The Associated Press. "It is very clear that there are certain streamers that have really kind of changed the way we work and the way that we have worked, and the contracts really haven't caught up to the innovation that's happened."

Growing pessimism surrounding the talks seemed to turn to open hostility when SAG-AFTRA released a statement Tuesday night.

It came in response to a report in Variety that a group of Hollywood CEOs had been the force behind the request for mediation, which the union said was leaked before its negotiators were informed of the request.

The AMPTP declined comment through a representative. It's not clear whether federal mediators have agreed to take part, but such an intervention would presumably require more time than the hours left on the contract.

"The AMPTP has abused our trust and damaged the respect we have for them in this process," the SAG-AFTRA statement said. "We will not be manipulated by this cynical ploy to engineer an extension when the companies have had more than enough time to make a fair deal."

AP National Writer Jocelyn Noveck contributed to this report.

## 3 tax prep firms shared 'extraordinarily sensitive' data about taxpayers with Meta, lawmakers say

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Three large tax preparation firms sent "extraordinarily sensitive" information on tens of millions of taxpayers to Facebook parent company Meta over the course of at least two years, a group of congressional Democrats reported on Wednesday.

They say some of that data was then used by Meta to create targeted advertising to its own users, other companies, and to train Meta's algorithms.

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The Democrats' report urges federal agencies to investigate and potentially go to court over the wealth of information that H&R Block, TaxAct and TaxSlayer shared with the social media giant.

In a letter to the heads of the IRS, the Department of Justice, the Federal Trade Commission and the IRS watchdog, seven lawmakers say their findings "reveal a shocking breach of taxpayer privacy by tax prep companies and by Big Tech firms."

Their report said highly personal and financial information about sources of taxpayers' income, tax deductions and exemptions was made accessible to Meta as taxpayers used the tax software to prepare their taxes.

That data came to Meta through its Pixel code, which the tax firms installed on their websites to gather information on how to improve their own marketing campaigns. In exchange, Meta was able to access the data to write targeted algorithms for its own users.

The program collected information on taxpayers' filing status, income, refund amounts, names of dependents, approximate federal tax owed, which buttons were clicked on the tax preparers' websites and the names of text entry forms that the taxpayer navigated, the report states.

Taxpayer data was also shared with Google, through its own tracking tools — though the firm told lawmakers that it never used the information to track users on the internet, according to the report.

The letter to federal agencies was signed by Sens. Elizabeth Warren, Ron Wyden, Richard Blumenthal, Tammy Duckworth, Bernie Sanders, Sheldon Whitehouse and Rep. Katie Porter. The lawmakers called for the agencies to "immediately open an investigation into this incident."

They ask the agencies to investigate "and prosecute any company or individuals who violated the law," saying it could result in billions of dollars in criminal liability to the firms.

The Markup, a nonprofit journalism outlet focusing on technology, initially reported on the data-sharing between tax firms and Meta in November. A TaxAct representative said the firm has engaged with Warren's office to explain its usage of the analytical tools and that protecting customers is its top priority.

A TaxSlayer representative said Wednesday that the report "contains numerous false or misleading statements" regarding the taxpayers' personal and filing information sent to Meta and Google and it will request a retraction or correction from Warren's office.

H&R Block said that it takes protecting client privacy very seriously and has taken steps to prevent the sharing of information through the Pixel coding.

And Meta said that it has been clear in its policies that advertisers "should not send sensitive information about people through our Business Tools."

"Doing so is against our policies and we educate advertisers on properly setting up Business tools to prevent this from occurring," the company said in an emailed statement. "Our system is designed to filter out potentially sensitive data it is able to detect."

Meta's Facebook has a history of failure when it comes to protecting user privacy.

One of its biggest scandals erupted in 2018 when investigations revealed that Cambridge Analytica, a firm with ties to Donald Trump's onetime political strategist Steve Bannon, had paid a Facebook app developer for access to the personal information of about 87 million Facebook users. That data was then used to target U.S. voters during the 2016 campaign that culminated in Trump's election as the 45th president.

Facebook agreed to a \$725 million user settlement in that case, and later was fined \$5 billion by the U.S. Federal Trade Commission.

This May, the FTC proposed sweeping new changes to its standing privacy order for Meta that would bar the company from using any data collected from children under 18, including via its virtual reality technologies. The new rules would also force Meta to pause new products and services until an independent assessor confirms that they comply with the FTC order. The under-18 concerns stem largely from Facebook's Messenger for Kids app, which has long drawn fire for insufficient privacy protections for its younger users.

Also in 2018, the company disclosed that almost 50 million accounts had been vulnerable to the theft of digital "user tokens" that attackers could use to log into personal accounts. Facebook admitted the same

year that most of its then 2.2 billion users had likely had their public data “scraped” by malicious actors. Representatives from the IRS and FTC did not immediately respond to requests for comment. DOJ and the IRS watchdog declined to comment.

The Democrats say their report serves as an argument for the creation of an electronic free-file system for submitting tax returns that would be run by the government, which the IRS is currently piloting.

The IRS plans to launch a pilot program for the 2024 filing season to test a “direct file” system and help the federal government decide whether to move forward with potentially implementing it in the future.

The IRS in May published a feasibility report laying out taxpayer interest in direct file, how the system could work, its potential cost, operational challenges and more.

The report shows that the majority of surveyed taxpayers would be interested in using an IRS-provided tool to prepare and file their taxes electronically — almost 50% of respondents who preferred the IRS free-file option over commercial tax preparation firms said they preferred to give their financial information directly to the IRS instead of the third party.

AP writer David Hamilton in San Francisco contributed to this report.

## **FBI Director Chris Wray defends the ‘real FBI’ against criticism from House Republicans**

By FARNOUSH AMIRI, ERIC TUCKER and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — FBI Director Chris Wray defended the “real FBI” during a contentious congressional hearing Wednesday, rejecting a litany of grievances from angry Republicans who are harshly critical of the bureau, threatening to defund some operations and claiming the Justice Department is unfair to political conservatives, including Donald Trump.

Wray refused to engage in specific questions about ongoing federal investigations, including those involving former President Trump and Hunter Biden. The son of President Joe Biden recently reached an agreement to plead guilty to misdemeanor federal tax charges; Republicans have derided that as a sweetheart deal.

In testy exchanges with Republicans on the House Judiciary Committee, Wray rejected the GOP assertion that the bureau was favoring the Biden family and said the notion that the bureau was involved the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol was “ludicrous.” Referring to his own background, he said the idea that he harbors bias against conservatives is “insane.”

“The work the men and women of the FBI do to protect the American people goes way beyond one or two investigations that seem to capture all the headlines,” said Wray, a registered Republican whom Trump nominated to lead the FBI after firing James Comey in 2017.

The director spelled out the bureau’s crime-fighting work breaking up drug cartels, taking some 60 suspected criminals off the streets each day and protecting Americans from “a staggering array of threats.”

He said, “That is the real FBI.”

It’s the latest display of the new normal on Capitol Hill, where Republicans who have long billed themselves as the champions of police and “law and order” are deeply at odds with federal law enforcement and the FBI, accusing the bureau of bias dating to investigations of Trump when he was president.

This new dynamic has forced Democrats into a position of defending law enforcement agencies they have long criticized. Wray testified for nearly six hours.

The committee chairman, Republican Rep. Jim Jordan of Ohio, said he is trying to stop what Republicans call the “weaponization” of the federal justice system, which they say is tilted against conservatives, including Trump and his allies.

Jordan opened the hearing reciting a federal judge’s recent ruling against the government’s efforts to halt misinformation on social media and listed other grievances over the FBI’s treatment of conservatives.

But the top Democrat on the committee, Rep. Jerrold Nadler of New York, said the hearing was “little

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more than performance art" by Republicans who are undertaking what he called baseless investigations too far-fetched to be true.

Wray generally steered clear of answering questions about the Justice Department's prosecution of Trump. The former president has pleaded not guilty to 37 felony counts over his mishandling of classified information at his Mar-a-Lago club and residence.

Wray did say that classified documents are required to be stored in what's known as a "sensitive compartmented information facility," or SCIF.

"In my experience," he said, "ballrooms, bathrooms and bedrooms are not SCIFs."

A separate Justice Department investigation is probing efforts by Trump and his allies to undo Biden's election in the run-up to Jan. 6, 2021.

During one tense exchange with Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., Wray noted that in Florida, the number of FBI applicants is up by more than 100%.

"We're deeply proud of them, and they deserve better than you," Gaetz said.

Typically measured, Wray became animated by the suggestion from Rep. Mike Johnson, R-La., that the FBI would have been involved in suppressing a theory that the coronavirus pandemic originated via a leak from a laboratory in China rather than a transfer from animals to humans.

"The idea that the FBI would somehow be involved in suppressing references to a lab leak theory is somewhat absurd when you consider the fact that the FBI was the only — the only — agency in the entire intelligence community to reach the assessment that it was more likely than not that was the explanation of the pandemic," Wray said, pointing for emphasis. He later noted the Energy Department's intelligence arm reached a similar finding.

Rep. Zoe Lofgren, D-Calif., said she thought it was "actually sad that the majority is engaging conspiracy theories in an effort to discredit one of the premier law enforcement agencies in the United States."

Jordan has been laying the groundwork for Wray's appearance since House Republicans took the majority in January.

Republicans have held hearings with former FBI agents, Twitter executives and federal officials to make the case that the FBI has been corruptly using its powers against Trump and the right. The GOP has formed a special committee on "weaponization" of government, also led by Jordan, to investigate abuse. Three panels opened a joint investigation into the Hunter Biden case, and one announced Wednesday that the two IRS whistleblowers who claimed Justice improperly interfered in the case will appear before Congress next week.

Hanging over the proceedings are GOP threats to impeach Attorney General Merrick Garland and withhold money for federal law enforcement as Congress is in the midst of preparing annual spending bills. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy has signaled he is open to impeachment and wants to rethink FBI spending on a new headquarters.

At one point, Rep. Thomas Massie showed a short surveillance video of the moments before officials found a pipe bomb outside the Democratic National Committee's Capitol Hill headquarters on the day of the Jan. 6, 2021, attack. Massie, R-Ky., demanded answers about the investigation, which is ongoing.

"We fund your department so you need to provide that," Massie said.

Republican criticisms of the FBI stretch back years, but became more prominent during the Trump-Russia investigation, when the Justice Department probed interference in the 2016 election.

One focus of Wednesday's hearing was the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, or FISA, that grants the FBI and other agencies broad powers to surveil the communications of foreigners outside the United States. A provision known as Section 702 is set to expire unless Congress agrees to renew it. Members of both parties are frustrated with the program.

Underscoring the extent to which surveillance errors during the Trump-Russia investigation continue to shadow the FBI, Rep. Tom Tiffany, R-Wis., said he will be allowing FISA to "sunset" if there are no reforms.

Wray, meanwhile, acknowledged a difference over Garland's 2021 memo instructing the FBI to coordinate with local law enforcement over threats against school boards. Republicans have complained that went too far in trying to police parents.

"I will say to you the same thing that I said to all 56 of our field offices as soon as I read the memo, which is that the FBI is not in the business of investigating or policing speech at school board meetings or anywhere else for that matter," said Wray.

Some of the GOP's most conservative members are pushing to cut off some funding for the FBI. McCarthy, R-Calif., has questioned spending money to build a new FBI headquarters out of downtown and in a Washington suburb. He has said Congress should focus on FBI offices in the states.

## Prosecutors won't seek death penalty against men charged in Whitey Bulger's prison killing

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Federal prosecutors will not pursue the death penalty against two men charged with the prison killing of notorious Boston gangster James "Whitey" Bulger, according to court papers filed Wednesday.

Prosecutors said in a court filing that in the event Fotios "Freddy" Geas, a former Mafia hitman, and Paul J. DeCologero, a Massachusetts gangster, are convicted of murder in Bulger's killing, they will not seek a death sentence. Geas also faced a possible death sentence if found guilty of an additional charge of murder by a federal prisoner serving a life sentence. But prosecutors said they would not seek it in the event he is convicted of that charge either.

Geas and DeCologero were charged last August in the 2018 slaying of 89-year-old Bulger, who who ran the largely Irish mob in Boston in the 1970s and '80s and served as an FBI informant who ratted on his gang's main rival. Bulger was killed just hours after he was transferred to USP Hazelton in West Virginia from another lockup in Florida and placed in the general population.

Bulger had been serving a life sentence for 11 murders and other crimes. The crime boss — who fled Boston in 1994 after being tipped off by his FBI handler that he was about to be indicted — was captured at the age 81 after more than 16 years on the run.

Geas and DeCologero are accused of striking Bulger in the head multiple times while a third man, Sean McKinnon, acted as a lookout. An inmate witness told authorities that DeCologero said he and Geas used a belt with a lock attached to it to beat Bulger to death.

Geas, DeCologero and McKinnon are all charged with conspiracy to commit murder, which carries up to life in prison. McKinnon, who is charged separately with making false statements to a federal agent, did not face a possible death sentence.

The men are scheduled to go on trial in December 2024 in federal court in West Virginia.

Patrick Nash, an attorney for DeCologero, called it the "correct decision by the Department of Justice."

"We are looking forward to our day in court. We trust the system and trust the fairness of the system and will put the facts in front of the jury," Nash said.

An attorney for Geas declined to comment. A lawyer who has represented Bulger's family didn't respond to an email.

The Justice Department's watchdog in December found that Bulger's beating death was the result of multiple layers of management failures, widespread incompetence and flawed policies at the Bureau of Prisons.

The inspector general found that bureau officials tried several times to downgrade Bulger's medical status in order to move him to other prisons after he caused trouble at the Florida lockup, despite the fact that he used a wheelchair and had serious heart conditions. Bureau officials failed to take into account or were unaware of Bulger's notoriety in their handling of his transfer despite his well-known history as an FBI asset, the watchdog found.

President Joe Biden said during his 2020 campaign that he would work to end capital punishment at the federal level and in states, and Attorney General Merrick Garland has paused executions to review policies and procedures. But federal prosecutors continue to work to uphold already-issued death sentences —

including that of Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev — and pursue the death penalty in certain cases.

Prosecutors are currently seeking the death penalty against Robert Bowers, who was convicted in the 2018 killings of 11 worshippers at a Pittsburgh synagogue — the deadliest antisemitic attack in U.S. history.

The Justice Department's announcement in Bulger's case comes days after the attack on another high-profile inmate in a federal prison.

Larry Nassar, the disgraced former sports doctor convicted of sexually abusing athletes and possessing explicit images of children, was stabbed at the same federal Florida prison Bulger was held before the former gangster was transferred to Hazelton. Nassar was taken to a hospital, where he remained in stable condition Wednesday with injuries including a collapsed lung.

## **Chris Eubanks' magical Wimbledon ends against Daniil Medvedev, who faces Carlos Alcaraz next**

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP Tennis Writer

WIMBLEDON, England (AP) — Chris Eubanks woke up Wednesday morning ahead of playing for a berth in the final four at Wimbledon against 2021 U.S. Open champion Daniil Medvedev and, first thing, like so many of us, reached for his phone to see what the buzz was about on Twitter.

"It was just constant me," Eubanks said. "I was just like, 'This is so weird.' I looked at it. I was like, 'Man, I'm really about to play a Grand Slam quarterfinal today. This is cool.'"

He took less than 10 minutes to let that sink in, then, as the 27-year-old American who captivated the crowds at the All England Club and many folks back home put it, "was able to lock back in." And so he pushed Medvedev the distance, taking a two-sets-to-one lead before running out of aces and energy.

Basking in the roars from the stands at No. 1 Court, the unseeded Eubanks came within four points of winning to extend his deepest run, by far, at a major tournament before Medvedev pulled away for a 6-4, 1-6, 4-6, 7-6 (4), 6-1 victory to reach the Wimbledon semifinals for the first time.

"It's like his level elevated into the fifth," Eubanks said, "where I had a little bit of a drop."

If Medvedev was unsteady for a bit, perhaps distracted by a back-and-forth with the chair umpire over a stray ball that headed toward the stands, he gathered himself well.

"Happy that I managed to put myself back together. There was a moment in the match I started just losing kind of everything — the focus, the momentum of the match," said the No. 3-seeded Medvedev, who will face No. 1 Carlos Alcaraz in the semifinals on Friday. "When I started losing it, I was like, 'All right, what's happening? Why is it happening like this?'"

Alcaraz's 7-6 (3), 6-4, 6-4 victory over No. 6 Holger Rune at Centre Court was the first men's quarterfinal at Wimbledon in the Open era, which dates to 1968, with two players who are not yet 21. Both Spain's Alcaraz, who won last year's U.S. Open, and Denmark's Rune are 20.

When Alcaraz smacked a backhand return winner to seal the first set, he threw his head back and screamed. He paused for a second and screamed again. He strutted to the sideline, head held high, and yelled, then got to the sideline and yelled "Vamos! Vamos!"

"It was nerves. Tension. It was everything," Alcaraz explained later.

In the women's quarterfinals, Ons Jabeur eliminated defending champion Elena Rybakina 6-7 (5), 6-4, 6-1 in a rematch of last year's title match, and reigning Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka defeated No. 25 seed Madison Keys 6-2, 6-4.

Jabeur, known more for her spins and slices and variety than her power, actually opted for trading big swings with Rybakina, whose game is built that way.

"If you want to hit hard," Jabeur said, "I'm ready to hit hard, too."

No. 6 Jabeur plays No. 2 Sabalenka on Thursday, when the other semifinal will be between unseeded players Elina Svitolina and Marketa Vondrousova. None of the four remaining women has won Wimbledon; Sabalenka is the only one who already owns a major trophy.

Sabalenka, who is from Belarus, and Medvedev, who is from Russia, were banned from the All England

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Club a year ago, along with every player representing those two countries, over the invasion of Ukraine. The war continues, but Russians and Belarusians were allowed back this time.

If Alcaraz's victory was altered by the first-set tiebreaker — "He gained more confidence from that set; I didn't," Rune said — Medvedev's started to tilt midway through the fourth-set tiebreaker.

Eubanks put a forehand in a corner that drew a netted backhand from Medvedev, making it 3-all. Many in the seats rose, cheering wildly, and Eubanks pumped his right fist, staring toward the support.

"The fans," he would say afterward, "definitely got their money's worth."

Medvedev's take on the way spectators backed Eubanks over the past 1 1/2 weeks, which included wins against No. 5 Stefanos Tsitsipas and No. 12 Cam Norrie: "Maybe his tennis. Maybe he's underdog."

Maybe. And maybe Eubanks, who is from Atlanta and was a college All-American at Georgia Tech, enjoyed that 3-all moment in the tiebreaker just a tad too much.

Then again, hard to blame a guy who came into this tournament with a career record of 2-8 at the majors and who never had won an ATP title until the week before Wimbledon began.

So close to moving on, Eubanks faltered. So close to the brink, Medvedev surged, taking four of the following five points and pushing things to a fifth set.

Medvedev smacked a forehand winner. Eubanks sailed a forehand wide. Eubanks pushed a forehand return long. After Eubanks saved one set point with a service winner, he ceded the next by flubbing a forehand volley.

Medvedev, who won 28 of the 30 points he served in that set, shook his racket. He was fully back in the match — and, it turned out, on his way to a win.

"That's why he is who he is," Eubanks said, "and that's why he's done the things that he's done in the sport."

As intimidating a server as the lanky, 6-foot-7 Eubanks might be, Medvedev hit more aces, 28-17. And while Eubanks finished with more winners, 74-52, to raise his tournament total to 321 and break Andre Agassi's 1992 mark for most winners at a single Wimbledon (since 1977), Medvedev played incredibly cleanly. He only made 13 unforced errors, 42 fewer than Eubanks — although Medvedev questioned the accuracy of his count.

When the match ended, when Eubanks' wonderful ride was over, he was sent off toward the locker room by a loud and lengthy standing ovation — as his pal, 2022 French Open runner-up Coco Gauff, captured the scene with her phone camera.

Eubanks paused his walk. He turned to all sections of the arena to wave and then put his hands together overhead in the shape of a heart, soaking it all in.

AP tennis: <https://apnews.com/hub/tennis> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Sports](https://twitter.com/AP_Sports)

## Russia's Defense Ministry says Wagner mercenaries are surrendering their weapons to the military

MOSCOW (AP) — Mercenaries of the Wagner Group are completing the handover of their weapons to the Russian military, the Defense Ministry said Wednesday, a move that follows the private army's brief rebellion last month that challenged the Kremlin's authority.

The disarming of Wagner reflects efforts by authorities to defuse the threat it posed and also appears to herald an end to the mercenary group's operations on the battlefield in Ukraine.

The actions come amid continued uncertainty about the fate of Wagner chief Yevgeny Prigozhin and the terms of a deal that ended the armed rebellion by offering amnesty for him and his mercenaries along with permission to move to Belarus.

Among the weapons turned over were more than 2,000 pieces of equipment, such as tanks, rocket launchers, heavy artillery and air defense systems, along with over 2,500 metric tons of munitions and more than 20,000 firearms, the Defense Ministry said.

The statement follows the Kremlin's acknowledgment Monday that Prigozhin and 34 of his top officers

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met with President Vladimir Putin on June 29, five days after the rebellion. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Wagner's commanders pledged loyalty to Putin and that they were ready "to continue to fight for the Motherland."

Putin has said that Wagner troops had to choose whether to sign contracts with the Defense Ministry, move to Belarus or retire from service.

The Kremlin's confirmation that Putin met with Prigozhin, who led troops on a march to Moscow to demand the ouster of the country's top military leaders, raised new questions about the deal that ended the rebellion.

Putin denounced the revolt as an act of treason when it started and vowed harsh punishment for those who participated in it, but the criminal case against Prigozhin was dropped hours later as part of the deal. At the same time, the Wagner chief apparently could still face prosecution for financial wrongdoing or other charges.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, who brokered the deal that ended the mutiny, said last week that his country offered Wagner field camps but noted that Prigozhin was in Russia and that his troops remained at their home camps. Lukashenko noted that their deployment to Belarus would depend on decisions by Prigozhin and the Russian government.

During the revolt that lasted less than 24 hours, Prigozhin's mercenaries quickly swept through the southern Russian city of Rostov-on-Don and captured the military headquarters there without firing a shot before driving to within about 200 kilometers (125 miles) of Moscow. Prigozhin described it as a "march of justice" to oust the military leaders, who demanded that Wagner sign contracts with the Defense Ministry by July 1.

The mutiny faced little resistance and fighters downed at least six military helicopters and a command post aircraft, killing at least 10 airmen. When the deal was struck, Prigozhin ordered his troops to return to their camps.

The rebellion represented the biggest threat to Putin in his more than two decades in power and badly dented his authority, even though Prigozhin claimed the uprising was not aimed at the president but intended to force the ouster of Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and chief of the military's General Staff, Gen. Valery Gerasimov.

Both men have kept their jobs. Many observers suggested that even if Putin wasn't happy with their performance, Prigozhin's demand for their ouster helped secure their jobs, since firing them would be seen as a concession to the Wagner boss.

At the same time, uncertainty surrounds the fate of Gen. Sergei Surovikin, the deputy commander of the Russian group of forces fighting in Ukraine who reportedly had ties to Prigozhin.

Surovikin hasn't been seen since the rebellion began, when he posted a video urging an end to it, and two people in Washington familiar with the matter who spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss it publicly told The Associated Press in June that he has been detained. Several Russian military bloggers also said he has been detained and questioned.

Andrei Kartapolov, a retired general who heads the defense affairs committee in the lower house of the Russian parliament, said Wednesday that Surovikin was "resting" and is "not currently available," but wouldn't elaborate.

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Associated Press writers Tara Copp and Nomaan Merchant in Washington contributed.

## **Suspect in Larry Nassar stabbing said ex-doctor made lewd remark watching Wimbledon, AP source says**

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A prisoner suspected of stabbing Larry Nassar at a federal penitentiary in Florida said the disgraced former sports doctor provoked the attack by making a lewd comment while they were watching a Wimbledon tennis match on TV, a person familiar with the matter told The Associated Press.



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The inmate, identified as Shane McMillan, was previously convicted of assaulting a correctional officer at a federal penitentiary in Louisiana in 2006 and attempting to stab another inmate to death at the federal Supermax prison in Florence, Colorado in 2011, court records show.

McMillan attacked Nassar in his cell Sunday with a makeshift weapon, stabbing him multiple times in the neck, chest and back before four other inmates rushed in and pulled him off of Nassar, according to the person familiar with the matter.

Correctional officers assigned to the unit at the United States Penitentiary Coleman responded to Nassar's cell and performed what officials said were life-saving measures. He was taken to a hospital, where he remained in stable condition Wednesday with injuries including a collapsed lung.

Cell doors on most federal prison units are typically open during the day, letting prisoners move around freely within the facility. Because Nassar was attacked in his cell, the incident was not captured on surveillance cameras which only point at common areas and corridors.

McMillan, 49, told prison workers that he attacked Nassar after the sexually abusive ex-U.S. gymnastics team doctor made a comment about wanting to see girls playing in the Wimbledon women's match, the person said.

The person was not authorized to publicly discuss details of the attack or the ongoing investigation and did so on condition anonymity.

Messages seeking comment were left with lawyers who've represented McMillan in his past cases.

Sunday's attack was the second time Nassar has been assaulted in federal custody. He is serving decades in prison for sexually abusing athletes, including college and Olympic gymnastics stars, and possessing explicit images of children.

The attack underscored persistent problems at the federal Bureau of Prisons, including violence, short staffing and an inability to keep even its highest profile prisoners safe.

The Bureau of Prisons insists that there was adequate staffing at the prison where Nassar was stabbed, about 46 miles (74 kilometers) northwest of Orlando, though documents obtained by the AP show one-third of correctional officer positions remain unfilled at the prison.

In a statement Wednesday, the agency said it was "imperative that we increase our staffing levels" and said it was recruiting officers and using financial incentives to try to retain workers. Officials said they are also still working to "tackle the problem violence in our facilities" and have enhanced their security procedures, but would not provide details.

"The BOP takes seriously our duty to protect the individuals entrusted in our custody, as well as maintain the safety of correctional staff and the community," agency spokesperson Scott Taylor said.

"We make every effort to ensure the physical safety of individuals confined to our facilities through a controlled environment that is secure and humane," Taylor said. "As we continue to pivot out of a years-long pandemic, there are still challenges to confront and opportunities to improve our agency, protect the lives of those who work for us, and ensure the wellbeing of those entrusted to our custody."

McMillan is scheduled to be released from prison in May 2046, according to a Bureau of Prisons inmate database and court records, though that could change if he is charged and convicted of attacking Nassar.

McMillan was originally sentenced to more than 20 years in federal prison after pleading guilty in Wyoming to conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine in 2002. He had been expected to be released next year before his convictions for the Louisiana and Colorado prison attacks more than doubled his sentence.

In October 2006, McMillan punched a correctional officer who approached him in the recreation yard at the United States Penitentiary in Pollock, Louisiana, while investigating him for a prior inmate assault, according to court records. The blow knocked the officer to the ground and caused cuts and bruising to his face and nose. McMillan was sentenced to an additional five years.

In November 2011, McMillan and another inmate attempted to kill a prisoner at the federal Bureau of Prisons' Administrative Maximum Facility in Florence, Colorado, according to court records. McMillan and the other inmate stabbed the prisoner 66 times in a recreation area of the prison, known as the "Alcatraz of the Rockies." They were each sentenced to an additional 20 years for the attack.

McMillan arrived at the Coleman, Florida, penitentiary last December, according to records obtained by

the AP. He'd spent the previous four years at a federal penitentiary in Tucson, Arizona, following stints at federal prisons in Allenwood, Pennsylvania, and adjacent to the Supermax lockup in Colorado, the records show.

Nassar was transferred to Coleman from the Tucson penitentiary in August 2018. His lawyers said he'd been assaulted within hours of being placed in general population at the Arizona prison.

Associated Press reporter Alanna Durkin Richer contributed to this report.

The Associated Press receives support from the Public Welfare Foundation for reporting focused on criminal justice. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

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## Army chief nominee would boost recruiting, but Tuberville blockade leaves his confirmation uncertain

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Army officer tapped to be the service's next chief of staff outlined for senators on Wednesday his plan to fix what he described as the service's top challenge — rebuilding recruiting — as it becomes clear the Army will again fall short of its enlistment goal.

Gen. Randy George, the current vice chief of staff of the Army, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that the service is looking at short- and long-term ways to improve how recruiters are chosen and deployed around the country, and to better tailor marketing to attract young people.

Gen. James McConville, the Army chief of staff, said in an interview with The Associated Press on Tuesday that preliminary estimates suggest the Army will recruit more than 50,000 soldiers this year, an increase over last year, but still short of its 65,000 goal. Last year the Army enlisted 45,000, missing its goal by 15,000. Recruiting this year, said McConville, could go up by 10%-20%.

McConville will step down Aug. 4, but George's confirmation is uncertain at best, due to a Senate dispute over military nominations. More than 260 are being stalled by Republican Sen. Tommy Tuberville of Alabama, who is blocking confirmation of all senior military officers to protest a Defense Department policy that pays for travel when a service member has to go out of state to get an abortion or other reproductive care.

While senators spent a significant amount of time sharply debating the confirmation issue, they also asked pointed questions about how George would solve the recruiting shortfall.

"It's the No. 1 challenge that we face, and the one thing that we have to be focused on," George said, adding that young people fear that enlisting will put their lives on hold. "I can remember that I was basically told, hey, it's going to accelerate your life. And I still use that because it was, because it has, and I think we need to get that word out."

George said he believes the Army must better tailor its messaging and marketing based on local areas, since national ads don't always resonate in cities or towns.

Asked what the U.S. Army has learned from the war in Ukraine, George said it has demonstrated the importance of a number of missile defense and new systems that can shoot down smaller drones. He said the Army is moving ahead with a wide range of modernization programs.

He was also asked about potential cuts to U.S. Army special operations forces. He said no decisions have been made, but the Army is reviewing the overall need for special operators since the counterterrorism fights by thousands of commandos in Iraq and Afghanistan are no longer the focus.

George is a highly decorated Army infantry soldier, who commanded at all levels and did multiple tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. He was commissioned at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 1988 and more recently served as commander of I Corps at Joint Base Lewis McChord.

He also was the senior military assistant to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin. He became vice chief of the

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Army last August. His awards including a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star with three oak clusters.

For the second day in a row, a Senate hearing on a new military leader devolved into a series of heated exchanges between the lawmakers over Tuberville's block on all Pentagon nominations.

"I can't help but comment on the futility of this hearing," said Sen. Angus King, I-Maine. "Since we know that General George will not be confirmed any time in the foreseeable future, not because of his qualifications or his experience or his vast knowledge that he would bring to the job. But because of a hold."

Mississippi Sen. Roger Wicker, the top Republican on the committee, countered that the Democratic leader can seek a vote on George using the normal legislative process. Tuberville earlier this week blocked an effort to get a Senate vote on the confirmation of Marine Gen. Eric Smith as the next commandant.

The comments triggered a lengthy rebuttal at the end of the session by the panel's chairman, Democratic Sen. Jack Reed of Rhode Island.

He said that voting on the more than 260 military nominations through the regular procedure, if Tuberville does not relent, would take 27 days with the Senate working "around the clock" or 84 days if the Senate worked eight hours a day.

"That is an impossible goal to achieve," he said, adding that it would prevent the Senate from dealing with other critical bills such as the budget.

Reed also said there will be a briefing for staff next Wednesday on the abortion policy and its legality.

## **Unaccompanied migrant girl from Guatemala dies in US custody from underlying disease, officials say**

By ACACIA CORONADO Associated Press

An unaccompanied 15-year-old migrant girl from Guatemala died on Monday from an underlying disease while in federal custody, according to officials.

This marks the fourth death of a child in U.S. government custody this year.

The girl had been hospitalized at El Paso Children's Hospital for a significant, pre-existing illness when she was referred from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to the Office of Refugee Resettlement in May, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services said in a statement Tuesday.

The girl was provided medical treatment "according to the mother's wishes and aligned with the recommendations of the hospital's health care provider team," the statement said.

The girl's condition deteriorated Friday, and she died Monday as a result of multi-organ failure due to an underlying disease, officials said. Officials said her mother and brother were with her when she died and in the days leading up to her death.

Officials did not release the girl's name or say when she had entered the country.

In May, a 17-year-old boy from Honduras died in U.S. custody. Ángel Eduardo Maradiaga Espinoza died at a holding center in Safety Harbor, Florida. His mother said her son had epilepsy but showed no signs of being seriously ill before he left for the United States.

Days later, an 8-year-old girl from Panama who had a history of heart problems and sickle cell anemia died while she and her family were in custody of Border Patrol in Harlingen, Texas. The mother of Anadith Danay Reyes Alvarez said agents repeatedly ignored pleas to hospitalize Anadith as her daughter felt pain in her bones, struggled to breathe and was unable to walk.

In March, a 4-year-old "medically fragile unaccompanied child from Honduras" died at a hospital in Michigan, according to a Health and Human Services statement at the time.

The deaths raised questions and scrutiny over the qualifications of U.S. agents to handle medical emergencies by migrants in their custody.

## US inflation hits its lowest point since early 2021 as prices ease for gas, groceries and used cars

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Squeezed by painfully high prices for two years, Americans have gained some much-needed relief with inflation reaching its lowest point since early 2021 — 3% in June compared with a year earlier — thanks in part to easing prices for gasoline, airline fares, used cars and groceries.

The inflation figure the government reported Wednesday was down sharply from a 4% annual rate in May, though still above the Federal Reserve's 2% target. From May to June, overall prices rose 0.2%, up from just 0.1% in the previous month but still comparatively mild.

Even with Wednesday's better-than-expected inflation data, the Fed is considered all but sure to raise its benchmark rate when it meets in two weeks. But with price increases slowing — or even falling outright — across a range of goods and services, many economists say they think the central bank could hold off on what had been expected to be another rate hike in September, should inflation continue to cool.

"It takes the second hike off the table, if that trend continues," said Laura Rosner-Warburton, senior economist at MacroPolicy Perspectives. "They're probably on hold for the rest of the year."

On Wall Street, investors cheered the encouraging news, sending stock and bond prices higher. Investors have been eagerly anticipating the eventual end of the central bank's rate increases.

The Fed has raised its benchmark rate by a substantial 5 percentage points since March 2022, the steepest pace of increases in four decades. Its expected hike this month will follow the central bank's decision to pause its rate increases last month after 10 consecutive hikes.

Wednesday's inflation data may lift hopes that the Fed will achieve a difficult "soft landing," in which price increases fall back to 2% without causing a spike in unemployment or a deep recession. Last week, the government reported solid hiring in June, though it slowed compared with earlier this year. The unemployment rate ticked lower, from 3.7% to 3.6%, near a half-century low.

When the Fed began raising its key rate a year ago, many economists expected that unemployment would have to rise significantly to curb inflation. Though inflation isn't yet fully tamed, some economists say they think it can fall to a level near the Fed's 2% target earlier than they had expected.

Excluding the volatile food and energy prices, so-called core inflation was lower last month than economists had expected, rising just 0.2% from May to June, the smallest monthly increase in nearly two years. Compared with a year ago, core inflation does remain relatively high, at 4.8%, but down from a 5.3% annual rate in May.

In just the past two months, overall inflation, measured year over year, has slowed from nearly 5% in April to just 3% now. Much of that progress reflects the fading of spikes in food and energy prices that followed Russia's invasion of Ukraine last spring. Inflation is now significantly below its peak of 9.1% in June 2022.

Gas prices have fallen to about \$3.54 a gallon on average, nationally, down from a \$5 peak last year. Grocery prices have leveled off in the past three months and were unchanged from May to June. Milk prices, having dropped for a third straight month, are down 1.9% from last year.

Eggs, which had skyrocketed last year after an outbreak of avian flu decimated chicken flocks, have dropped to \$2.22 a dozen — down more than 7% just in the past month. Egg prices had peaked at \$4.82 in January, according to government data. Still, they remain above the average pre-pandemic price of about \$1.60 a dozen.

Economists say inflation isn't likely to keep falling at such a rapid pace. On a 12-month basis, inflation could even tick up in the coming months now that big drops in gas prices — they're down 27% in the past year — have been achieved.

In particular, airfares plunged 8.1% just from May to June, hotel costs 2% and car rental prices 1.4% — sharp drops that aren't likely to be replicated.

And the cost of some services are still rising and likely to stay high this year, potentially keeping core prices elevated. Auto insurance costs, for instance, have soared, and are up 16.9% from a year ago. Ameri-

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cans are driving more than during the pandemic and causing more accidents. Insurance is also costlier because vehicle prices are much higher than before the pandemic, and cars are therefore more valuable.

Restaurant prices are still moving up, having risen 0.4% from May to June and nearly 8% from a year earlier. Restaurant owners have had to keep raising wages to find and retain workers, and many of them are passing their higher labor costs on to their customers by raising prices.

Chrishon Lampley, owner of the wine brand Love Cork Screw, says more expensive restaurant prices have led her to cut back on taking prospective customers out for meals. Instead, she gives potential wine buyers small gifts.

The cost of printing labels for her wine bottles has nearly doubled in the past year, Lampley said, mostly because of higher labor costs. She's reduced her travel costs as a result. Lampley now chooses extended-stay hotels with kitchens rather than regular hotels, and she rents smaller cars even though she often carts around cases of wine.

"Everything has just become way more frugal," she said. "I've got to pull back."

Chair Jerome Powell and other Fed officials have focused their attention, in particular, on chronically high inflation for restaurant meals, auto insurance and other items in the economy's sprawling service sector. It's a big reason why several Fed policymakers were still talking earlier this week about the likelihood of two more rate hikes.

"We're likely to need a couple more rate hikes over the course of this year to really bring inflation back into ... a sustainable 2% path," Mary Daly, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, said on Monday.

At the same time, Daly said she was "holding myself to ... extreme data dependence" and could shift her thinking based on incoming reports. There will be two more inflation reports — for July and August — before the Fed meets in September.

Some drivers of higher prices are likely to keep fading and pull down inflation in the coming months. Used car prices sank 0.5% from May to June, after two months of big spikes. New-car prices, too, have begun to ease as a result, and were unchanged from May to June.

In June, used vehicle prices paid by dealers were down 5.6% from a year earlier, helping to cool inflation, according to data gathered by Black Book, which monitors prices. But used vehicles are still comparatively pricey: Dealers are paying almost 70% more for them than in June 2019, before the pandemic began. The average list price offered by dealers to consumers was \$28,850 last month.

Alex Yurchenko, chief data officer for Black Book, said he expects prices paid by consumers to keep falling through year's end, contributing to declining inflation. But they aren't expected to drop dramatically. Typically, prices fall in the second half of the year, then rise in the spring as the car-buying season begins.

"We expect a return to some kind of normality," Yurchenko said.

Supplies of new vehicles are rising, and prices are dropping slightly. As a global shortage of computer chips wanes, automakers have accelerated production. New-vehicle prices peaked in December but fell 3% to \$45,978 last month, according to estimates from J.D. Power.

And rental costs, a huge driver of inflation, are expected to keep declining, as builders continue to complete the most new apartment units in decades. Rising housing costs have driven more than two-thirds of the increase in core inflation in the past year, the government said, so as that increase fades it should steadily lower overall inflation.

Prices first spiked two years ago as consumers ramped up their spending on items like exercise bikes, standing desks and new patio furniture, fueled by three rounds of stimulus checks. The jump in consumer demand overwhelmed supply chains and ignited inflation.

Many economists have suggested that President Joe Biden's stimulus package in March 2021 intensified the inflation surge. At the same time, though, inflation also jumped overseas, even in countries where much less stimulus was put in place.

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AP Auto Writer Tom Krisher contributed to this report from Detroit.

## At NATO summit, Biden declares 'our unity will not falter' on Ukraine

By CHRIS MEGERIAN and SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

VILNIUS, Lithuania (AP) — President Joe Biden pledged Wednesday that western allies “will not waver” in defense of Ukraine, casting the struggle against Russian aggression as one of the world’s central challenges requiring a broad coalition of countries to stand in defense of freedom.

“Our unity will not falter,” Biden declared. “I promise you.”

He made the promise at the NATO summit in the capital of Lithuania, a country that he said knows the “transformational power of freedom” after spending decades under Moscow’s thumb. He drew parallels between Lithuania’s struggle to escape Soviet rule and Ukraine’s ongoing fight to repel Russia’s deadly invasion, highlighting the importance of rallying allies to take on the challenge.

“America never recognized the Soviet occupation of the Baltic,” he said to an outpouring of cheers from a crowd of thousands in a courtyard at Vilnius University draped with American and Lithuanian flags. “Never, never.” More spectators gathered in an overflow area, where a big screen was set up.

Biden spent two days in Vilnius for the annual NATO summit, where members of the western military alliance pledged more support for Ukraine but stopped short of extending an invitation for the besieged country to join the alliance. After meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who entered the summit demanding a clear path for his country toward joining the alliance, something that was initially promised back in 2008, Biden said that other security guarantees agreed to at the summit will be even more significant.

“One thing Zelenskyy understands now is that whether or not he’s in NATO now, it’s not relevant as long as he has commitments,” Biden said, comparing the situation to how the U.S. ensures Israel’s security edge over its neighbors.

The president pointed to the U.S. and allied response to Moscow’s invasion as a model for how to respond to other global challenges, from climate change to the rise of China, saying nations’ positions are stronger when they “build the broadest and deepest coalition.”

“Our commitment to Ukraine will not weaken,” he said. “We will stand for freedom today, tomorrow and for as long as it takes.”

The president was headed next to Finland, the newest member of NATO, for a meeting of Nordic leaders. During his speech, Biden hailed an agreement to advance Sweden’s membership in NATO after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan agreed to drop his objections.

“President Erdogan kept his word,” Biden said, clearing a path for the alliance to have 32 members.

The U.S. president’s enthusiasm for expanding NATO has not extended to Ukraine. He’s expressed concerns about the country’s readiness to join the alliance, as well as fears that the West could be drawn into a wider conflict with Russia.

The competing priorities in the midst of Europe’s bloodiest war in generations created an undercurrent of friction even as Biden and Zelenskyy projected a united front when they met earlier Wednesday. Their public encounter had the vibe of two leaders clearing the air, and each conspicuously heaped praise on his counterpart.

Biden lauded Zelenskyy and Ukrainians for their courage by saying it’s “been a model for the whole world to see.” Zelenskyy thanked Biden and the American people for billions of dollars in military assistance, saying that “you spend this money for our lives.”

Wearing a blue-and-yellow-striped tie in the colors of the Ukrainian flag, Biden acknowledged that Zelenskyy has occasionally been unsatisfied by unfulfilled requests for weapons.

“The frustration, I can only imagine,” Biden said. “I know that you’re many times frustrated about whether things get to you quickly enough, what’s getting to you and how we’re getting it. But I promise you, the United States is doing everything we can to get you what you need.”

Biden also said the war had created a sense of unity about opposing international aggression.

“It’s bringing the world together,” he said. “It’s a hell of a price to pay, but it’s bringing the world together.”

The meeting came after a few other encounters between Biden and Zelenskyy at the summit. They sat close to each other at the inaugural meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Council, a new forum that's intended to give Kyiv a greater voice within the alliance.

And they shared the stage as the Group of Seven, which includes the world's most powerful democratic countries, announced plans for long-term security assistance for Ukraine.

But Wednesday afternoon was the first opportunity for Biden and Zelenskyy to sit down privately with their advisers after their public comments.

And by then, Zelenskyy had softened his tone considerably. En route to Vilnius on Tuesday, he had blasted NATO's vague plans for Ukraine's eventual membership, tweeting, "It's unprecedented and absurd when a time frame is set neither for the invitation nor for Ukraine's membership."

Jake Sullivan, Biden's national security adviser, said everyone "needs to look squarely at the fact" that allowing Ukraine to join NATO at this point "means war with Russia."

"That is an inescapable fact," he told CNN.

Sullivan credited Biden with ensuring that NATO is "more unified and more determined and more decisive than at any point."

"That's President Biden's legacy when it comes to NATO, and it's one that he can be very proud of," he said.

In an interview with The Associated Press before Biden left on his trip, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said the president has been "heading in the right direction but not fast enough" when it comes to supporting Ukraine.

"The weapons transfers never seem to happen as soon as they're announced," said McConnell, a Kentucky Republican. Although Ukrainians are "extremely grateful for the help," he said, the assistance "frequently doesn't get there soon enough to be the most effective."

Although McConnell has been a firm supporter of sending help to Ukraine, other Republicans have voiced skepticism, creating uncertainty about Biden's ability to make long-term financial commitments.

## **Suspect arrested in killing of a former Russian submarine captain who reportedly attacked Ukraine**

By The Associated Press undefined

A 64-year-old man has been arrested in southern Russia for the shooting death of a former submarine commander who is alleged by some in Ukraine to have killed more than 20 civilians in a long-range missile strike last year.

Sergei Denisenko was detained on suspicion of shooting former 2nd Capt. Stanislav Rzhitsky, reportedly during a morning jog in the city of Krasnodar on July 10.

Denisenko was found in possession of a pistol and silencer, officials said. Some Russian media outlets identified him as a native of Sumy, a city in Ukraine.

Rzhitsky, 42, was attacked near the city's Olimp sports complex where he often followed the same 4-mile path, according to the Russian online news outlet Baza, which didn't specify the source of its report.

Baza reported that Rzhitsky often posted screenshots from a fitness app, leading to speculation the attacker could have used social media data to track his route. The reports could not be independently verified.

At the time of his death, Rzhitsky was deputy head of military mobilization in the Krasnodar city administration.

Ukrainian media reported that Rzhitsky was one of six submarine commanders able to launch long-range missiles that hit the Ukrainian city of Vinnytsia in July 2022, killing 23 people and wounding more than 100.

The Ukrainian Armed Forces' strategic communications division also said Rzhitsky was involved in carrying out the strike, citing Ukrainian intelligence. In a Telegram post, the division said Rzhitsky was "apparently liquidated by his own (people) for refusing to continue following orders of the command to launch missile attacks on peaceful Ukrainian cities."

Kyrylo Budanov, head of the Ukrainian Defense Ministry's main intelligence directorate, denied any involvement by Kyiv in the attack on Rzhitsky. However, the agency posted details about the killing on its Telegram channel, including the time of the attack, the number of shots fired, and local weather conditions.

Accounts of the killing differed. Ukrainian intelligence said Rzhitsky had been shot seven times, while Russian news outlets Baza and Mash reported he had been shot six times.

Rzhitsky was named commander of the submarine Krasnodar in 2016, and took part in Moscow's military campaign in Syria, Russian media reported.

His address and other personal details had been posted on the Ukrainian website Myrotvorets — "Peacemaker" in English. The site, which acts as an unofficial database of those considered by its users to be enemies of Ukraine, described Rzhitsky in 2022 as a "Russian war criminal."

Rzhitsky's family denies he took part in the invasion, telling Baza he had resigned his post in December 2021. They also said Rzhitsky had been included on the Myrotvorets database as early as 2014, when Russia illegally annexed the Crimean Peninsula and took over a submarine based there that once was part of Ukraine's fleet.

Follow AP coverage of the war in Ukraine at <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine>

## **Pence would ban abortions when pregnancies aren't viable. His GOP rivals won't say if they agree**

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — In a Republican presidential field full of candidates opposed to abortion rights, Mike Pence stands out in his embrace of the cause.

The former vice president, who is seeking the White House in 2024, is the only major candidate who supports a federal ban on abortion at six weeks, before many women know they're pregnant. He has advocated pulling from the market a widely used abortion pill that has a better safety record than penicillin and Viagra. And he's implored his Republican rivals to back a 15-week federal ban as a minimum national standard, which several have not done.

In a recent interview, Pence went even further, saying abortion should be banned when a pregnancy isn't viable. Such a standard would force women to carry pregnancies to term even when doctors have determined there is no chance a baby will survive outside the womb.

"I'm pro-life. I don't apologize for it," Pence said in the interview. "I just have heard so many stories over the years of courageous women and families who were told that their unborn child would not go to term or would not survive. And then they had a healthy pregnancy and a healthy delivery."

Doctors disputed Pence's characterization, saying there are conditions that are always incompatible with life and others where the chance of survival is so slim that most patients, when previously given the choice, concluded that continuing the pregnancy wasn't worth the suffering, grief or risk.

Pence, however, says he's undeterred.

"I want to always err on the side of life," he said. "I would hold that view in these matters because ... I honestly believe that we got this extraordinary opportunity in the country today to restore the sanctity of life to the center of American law."

Those comments place Pence firmly to the right of the rest of the 2024 presidential field and alone among GOP candidates, who largely declined to take a stance on the issue. And they drew alarms from obstetricians and doctors who specialize in high-risk pregnancies and say nonviable pregnancies are far more common than people realize. They range from ectopic pregnancies, when an embryo implants somewhere other than the uterus, to deadly birth defects and other severe pregnancy complications.

Banning abortions in these cases, doctors say, leads to outcomes that are both cruel and put women's lives and mental health at risk.

"One of the things that you cannot understate is the difficulty for a woman to carry a nonviable preg-



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nancy," said Alan Peaceman, professor emeritus of obstetrics and gynecology at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine. "It is psychological torture to go out in the world, for people to see your pregnancy — and people will come up to you and want to talk about your pregnancy. And that puts the woman in a terrible position that nobody should be in unless they chose to be in that position."

Once an issue largely hidden from public view, nonviable pregnancies have gained attention since the Supreme Court ended the constitutional right to an abortion last year, ushering in a wave of bans and restrictions in Republican-led states. Those moves have implications not only for unwanted pregnancies but also for cases where women receive heartbreaking diagnoses, often when they're months along into pregnancies that were deeply desired.

In states like Texas, Florida and Louisiana, women have described the anguish of being denied abortions even when they know their babies will be stillborn or die shortly after birth. Some have had to wait until they developed life-threatening infections for intervention. Others have spent thousands of dollars to travel to states where the procedure is still allowed.

Sarah Prager, a professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Washington Medical Center, said she and her colleagues have seen a steady stream of patients coming from states where abortions are now banned. About 11% of those patients, she said, have received a serious diagnosis, including cases where there is no chance of the fetus surviving.

"They are often absolutely shocked to learn that the abortion laws also prohibit them from being able to get care to be safe," she said, "even though they knew these laws were in place in this state."

Spokespeople for former President Donald Trump and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis declined to say whether they back Pence's position. Trump, the early front-runner, has repeatedly said he backs exceptions in cases of rape, incest and the life of the mother and has blamed hard-line abortion stances for costing the party in last year's midterm elections.

DeSantis, who is polling a distant second, signed a six-week ban in Florida that includes an exception for fatal fetal abnormalities, along with rape, incest and to save the mother's life. He has declined to say whether he supports a federal ban.

South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott's campaign pointed to an article that did not address the question of unviable pregnancies. A spokesman for former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley said only that she "will sign pro-life legislation that includes exceptions for rape, incest, and for the life of the mother," suggesting she, too, may be opposed to an exception for nonviable pregnancies — but declined to clarify.

Pence's push to end abortion puts him at odds with the majority of Americans who are broadly opposed to the Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* reversal.

While most favor at least some restrictions, a majority of U.S. adults say abortion should be legal during the first weeks of pregnancy, even in states with the strictest limits, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

But Pence, an evangelical Christian, for whom the issue is deeply personal, argues restricting abortion is "more important than politics" and calls it the "cause of our time."

As he works to appeal to conservatives in states like Iowa, Pence also points to the issue as one that distinguishes him from his GOP rivals, contrasting himself with "some people in this field now who want to relegate this issue to just a debate among the states."

Pence does say he has "always supported" exceptions for rape, incest and to save the life of the mother, though he told an Indiana anti-abortion group in 2010 that he believed, "Abortion should never be legal," and later that it should only be legal to save the "life of the mother."

There are a number of fetal conditions in which doctors generally agree there is "truly zero probability for a healthy outcome," including anencephaly, a severe neural tube defect in which the skull doesn't form and the brain is exposed, said David Hackney, a spokesperson for the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine and a high-risk obstetrician in the Cleveland area.

"The chances of survival are absolute zero ... no matter what Mike Pence says," he said. In such cases, he said, "it feels absurd" for people to be "forced against their will to carry pregnancies to term."

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But other cases are grayer. Take premature rupture of membranes, when the water breaks early, often in the second trimester, leaving a fetus without the amniotic fluid that protects it and supports the development of organs, including the lungs. In those cases, survival generally depends how early the rupture has occurred.

Hackney said with early membrane rupture, "you do have rare survivors," but that "exceedingly poor prognosis" comes with a litany of risks, including hemorrhaging, blood loss and dangerous infection, which can cause permanent infertility, shock and sepsis as women wait to deliver or qualify for abortions under "life of the mother" exceptions.

That's what happened to Savita Halappanavar, the 31-year-old woman who died in Ireland in 2012 of sepsis after she was denied an abortion, prompting the country to overturn its longstanding ban.

Rachel Neal is a fellow with Physicians for Reproductive Health and an OB-GYN in Georgia, where abortion is outlawed after cardiac activity is detected, around six weeks. While the state provides an exception in cases in which the "physician determines, in reasonable medical judgment, that the pregnancy is medically futile," she said water breaking in the late second trimester would typically not be covered.

That means women who previously had the choice to end their pregnancies early now either have to leave the the state or wait to deliver a baby that will likely die immediately or shortly after birth, while putting themselves at high risk of infection that could impact their ability to get pregnant again.

"It's completely uncharted territory," Neal said. "Before all of this, almost nobody chose this. ... It was very uncommon that someone would choose to wait ... because realistically any outcome that would result in a live birth is so slim."

Nine states with abortion restrictions explicitly exempt cases of lethal fetal anomalies, according to the Guttmacher Institute, a research group that supports abortion rights. Even in states with such exemptions, however, doctors say there can be confusion.

Some states have developed lists for what qualifies as a fatal fetal condition, but doctors say they will never fully capture every potential diagnosis. And most states do not have such lists, leaving definitions up for interpretation.

"How lethal does it have to be?" Peaceman asked. "Does it have to die within the first few hours? Or the first 30 days?"

At the same time, doctors in some states risk felony convictions that can carry five or 10 years of mandatory prison time if others dispute their interpretations of what some complain are overly broad and confusing rules.

Eric Scheidler, the executive director of the Pro-Life Action League, a nonprofit that advocates against abortion, accused "politically motivated physicians" of focusing on "edge cases" to "maintain a broad abortion license" and in some cases "deliberately misunderstanding what the law says in order to create this narrative that we have to have complete abortion license or we'll have physicians caught in a quandary."

Nonetheless, he said he thinks candidates should focus on the majority of abortions and not these kinds of cases.

"I really want to see these candidates talk about where we have areas of broad consensus," he said. "I would encourage political candidates to espouse positions that are widely held. ... I don't want to get hung up on these very rare cases."

## Music streams for 2023 hit 1 trillion in record time. Latin and K-pop artists are big reasons why

By MARIA SHERMAN AP Music Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Is non-English language music the future of the music business? Perhaps.

The global music industry surpassed 1 trillion streams at the fastest pace, ever, in a calendar year, Luminate's 2023 Midyear Report has found. The number was reached in three months, a full month faster than 2022.

Global streams are also up 30.8% from last year, reflective of an increasingly international music marketplace.

Additionally, Luminate found that two in five — or 40% — of U.S. music listeners enjoy music in a non-English language. And a whopping 69% of U.S. music listeners enjoy music from artists originating outside of the U.S.

According to the report, Spanish, French, Japanese, Korean, Italian, German, and Arabic are the most popular languages for non-Anglophonic music among U.S. music listeners, with Latin genres and K-pop leading the charge.

“Specifically, our streaming data shows that Spanish and Korean language music are the most popular when taking a look at the top 10,000 most streamed songs (audio and video combined) during the first half of 2023,” says Jaime Marconette, Luminate’s senior director of music insights and industry relations.

“Furthermore, Spanish-language music’s share of that top 10,000 has grown 3.6% since 2021, while English-language music’s share has dropped 4.2% in that same time,” he says.

That is reflected in Luminate’s 2023 Midyear Top Albums chart, where Bad Bunny’s spring 2022 album “Un Verano Sin Ti” still breaks the top 10 a year later (the chart factors in a combination of album sales, on-demand audio/visual sales, and digital track sales). When “top albums” are defined by physical and digital sales exclusively, K-pop dominates, taking up six of the top 10 spots.

“K-pop fans are, unsurprisingly, some of the most enthusiastic fans across physical formats,” Marconette says.

Luminate found that K-pop fans are 69% more likely to purchase vinyl and 46% more likely to purchase CDs than the average U.S. music listener in the next 12 months. One in four K-pop fans has purchased a cassette in the last 12 months.

## Senators call for Supreme Court to follow ethics code like other branches of government

By CHRIS MEGERIAN, ERIC TUCKER and BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

The chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, responding to Associated Press investigative stories on the Supreme Court, said Tuesday it was time for the justices to bring their conduct in line with the ethical standards of other branches of government.

“If they just establish the basic standards of every other branch of government, it would give us much more confidence in their integrity,” Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., said. He commented in Vilnius, Lithuania, where he was attending the NATO summit as part of the U.S. delegation.

The AP published stories showing that Justice Sonia Sotomayor, aided by her staff, has advanced sales of her books through college visits over the past decade; that universities have used trips by justices as a lure for financial contributions by placing them in event rooms with wealthy donors, and that justices have taken expenses-paid teaching trips to attractive locations that are light on actual classroom instruction.

The series comes after stories over the past six months that have raised ethical concerns about the activities of the justices. Durbin and other lawmakers in Washington have announced a vote next week on legislation that would require the court to adopt an ethics code. While the measure is unlikely to pass, it sends a signal of discontent about the court.

The nation’s highest court operates without an ethics code, instead following what Chief Justice John Roberts has referred to as a set of foundational “ethics principles and practices.”

Asked Tuesday about the AP stories, Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., who also sits on the Judiciary Committee, called them “powerful reports” that amount to a “drip-by-drip-by-drip indictment of a Supreme Court that seems answerable to no one for ethical breaches.

“The chief justice really ought to be taking these into account for the sake the court and the country because the Supreme Court will no longer exist as a truly viable institution if it continues the failure to face the need for a code of ethics,” he said.

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In contrast, Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, another member of the Judiciary Committee, said he believes Congress should leave the ethics issue to the court and that the Democrats' pursuit of ethics reform "is part of a long-standing assault against the court that the left feels is undermining a lot of things they've accomplished over the years by judicial action. To me, that's the motivating factor."

"I think it's a co-equal branch of government we don't have jurisdiction over. Secondly, I think this is part of a false narrative that the court is out of control and needs Congress to save it," Cornyn said.

Kathleen Clark, a law professor at Washington University in St. Louis and an expert in legal ethics, said the latest reporting reveals the extent to which "ethics problems at the Supreme Court is an equal opportunity scandal.

"It's not just about Clarence Thomas and (Samuel) Alito," Clark said, referring to earlier media reporting about the two conservative justices. "It's an institutional rather than individual problem."

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Megerian reported from Vilnius, Lithuania. AP writer Kevin Freking in Washington contributed to this report.

## **Pence would ban abortions when pregnancies aren't viable. His GOP rivals won't say if they agree**

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — In a Republican presidential field full of candidates opposed to abortion rights, Mike Pence stands out in his embrace of the cause.

The former vice president, who is seeking the White House in 2024, is the only candidate who supports a federal ban on abortion at six weeks, before many women know they're pregnant. He has advocated pulling from the market one of two widely used abortion pills, a medication with a better safety record than penicillin and Viagra. And he's implored his Republican rivals to back a 15-week federal ban as a minimum national standard, which most have not done.

In a recent interview, Pence went even further, saying abortion should be banned when a pregnancy isn't viable. Such a standard would force women to carry pregnancies to term even when doctors have determined there is no chance a baby will survive outside the womb.

"I'm pro-life. I don't apologize for it," Pence said. "I just have heard so many stories over the years of courageous women and families who were told that their unborn child would not go to term or would not survive. And then they had a healthy pregnancy and a healthy delivery."

Doctors disputed Pence's characterization, saying there are conditions that are always incompatible with life and others where the chance of survival is so slim that most patients, when previously given the choice, concluded that continuing the pregnancy wasn't worth the risks.

Pence, however, is undeterred.

"I want to always err on the side of life," he said. "I would hold that view in these matters because ... I honestly believe that we got this extraordinary opportunity in the country today to restore the sanctity of life to the center of American law."

Those comments place Pence firmly to the right of the 2024 presidential field and alone among GOP candidates, who largely declined to take a stance on the issue. And they drew alarms from obstetricians and doctors who say nonviable pregnancies are far more common than people realize. Those range from ectopic pregnancies, when an embryo implants somewhere other than the uterus, to fatal fetal abnormalities and severe pregnancy complications.

Banning abortions in these cases, doctors say, leads to outcomes that are cruel and put women's lives and mental health at risk.

"One of the things that you cannot understate is the difficulty for a woman to carry a nonviable pregnancy," said Alan Peaceman, professor emeritus of obstetrics and gynecology at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine. "It is psychological torture to go out in the world, for people to see your pregnancy — and people will come up to you and want to talk about your pregnancy. And that puts the

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woman in a terrible position that nobody should be in unless they chose to be in that position.”

Once an issue largely hidden from public view, nonviable pregnancies have faced greater scrutiny since the Supreme Court ended the constitutional right to an abortion last year, ushering in a wave of bans and restrictions in Republican-led states. Those moves have implications not only for unwanted pregnancies but also for cases in which women receive heartbreaking diagnoses, often when they’re months along into pregnancies that were deeply desired.

In states like Texas, Florida and Louisiana, women have described the anguish of being denied abortions even when they know their babies will be stillborn or die shortly after birth. Some have had to wait until they developed life-threatening infections for intervention. Others have spent thousands of dollars to travel to states where the procedure is still allowed.

Sarah Prager, a professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Washington Medical Center, said she and her colleagues have seen a steady stream of patients coming from states where abortions are now banned. About 11% of those patients, she said, have received a serious diagnosis, including cases in which there is no chance of the fetus surviving.

“They are often absolutely shocked to learn that the abortion laws also prohibit them from being able to get care to be safe,” she said.

Spokespeople for leading Republican presidential candidates, including former President Donald Trump, largely declined to say whether they back Pence’s position. Trump, the early front-runner, has repeatedly said he backs exceptions in cases of rape, incest and the life of the mother and blamed hard-line abortion stances for costing the party in last year’s midterm elections.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who is polling a distant second, signed a six-week ban in Florida that includes an exception for fatal fetal abnormalities, along with rape, incest and to save the mother’s life. He has declined to say whether he supports a federal ban.

A spokesperson for former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley, the sole woman in the GOP field, said she “will sign pro-life legislation that includes exceptions for rape, incest, and for the life of the mother,” suggesting she, too, may be opposed to an exception for nonviable pregnancies — but declined to clarify.

Pence’s push to end abortion puts him at odds with the majority of Americans who broadly oppose the Supreme Court’s *Roe v. Wade* reversal.

But Pence, an evangelical Christian, argues that restricting abortion is “more important than politics” and calls it the “cause of our time.”

Nine states with abortion restrictions explicitly exempt cases of lethal fetal anomalies, according to the Guttmacher Institute, a research group that supports abortion rights. Even in states with such exemptions, however, doctors say there can be confusion.

“How lethal does it have to be?” Peaceman asked. “Does it have to die within the first few hours? Or the first 30 days?”

At the same time, doctors risk felony convictions that can carry five or 10 years of mandatory prison time if others dispute their conclusions, leading to conservative interpretations of what they complain are overly broad and confusing rules.

Eric Scheidler, the executive director of the Pro-Life Action League, a nonprofit that advocates against abortion, accused “politically motivated physicians” of focusing on “edge cases” to “maintain a broad abortion license.”

Nonetheless, he said he thinks candidates should focus on the majority of abortions that involve healthy pregnancies.

“I really want to see these candidates talk about where we have areas of broad consensus,” he said, adding, “I don’t want to get hung up on these very rare cases.”

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## Today in History: July 13, George Zimmerman acquitted in Trayvon Martin killing

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, July 13, the 194th day of 2023. There are 171 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On July 13, 1960, John F. Kennedy won the Democratic presidential nomination on the first ballot at his party's convention in Los Angeles.

On this date:

In 1863, deadly rioting against the Civil War military draft erupted in New York City. (The insurrection was put down three days later.)

In 1923, a sign consisting of 50-foot-tall letters spelling out "HOLLYWOODLAND" was dedicated in the Hollywood Hills to promote a subdivision (the last four letters were removed in 1949).

In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson nominated Thurgood Marshall to be U.S. Solicitor General; Marshall became the first Black jurist appointed to the post. (Two years later, Johnson nominated Marshall to the U.S. Supreme Court.)

In 1973, former presidential aide Alexander P. Butterfield revealed to Senate Watergate Committee staff members the existence of President Richard Nixon's secret White House taping system.

In 1974, the Senate Watergate Committee proposed sweeping reforms in an effort to prevent another Watergate scandal.

In 1985, "Live Aid," an international rock concert in London, Philadelphia, Moscow and Sydney, took place to raise money for Africa's starving people.

In 1999, Angel Maturino Resendiz, suspected of being the "Railroad Killer," surrendered in El Paso, Texas.

In 2006, Israel imposed a naval blockade against Lebanon and blasted the Beirut airport and army air bases; Hezbollah fired dozens of rockets into Israel.

In 2011, California became the first state in the nation to add lessons about gays and lesbians to social studies classes in public schools under a measure signed by Gov. Jerry Brown.

In 2016, Theresa May entered No. 10 Downing Street as Britain's new prime minister following a bitter-sweet exit by David Cameron, who resigned after voters rejected his appeal to stay in the European Union.

In 2020, Washington's NFL franchise dropped the "Redskins" name and Indian head logo amid pressure from sponsors; the move followed decades of criticism that the name and logo were offensive to Native Americans. (The team was eventually renamed the Commanders.)

Ten years ago: A jury in Sanford cleared neighborhood watch volunteer George Zimmerman of all charges in the shooting of Trayvon Martin, the unarmed black teenager whose killing unleashed furious debate over racial profiling, self-defense and equal justice. Actor Cory Monteith, who had shot to fame in the hit TV series "Glee" but was beset by addiction struggles, was found dead in a hotel room in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada; he was 31. Attorney Leonard Garment, 89, a friend and adviser to President Richard Nixon, died in New York.

Five years ago: A grand jury indictment, sought by special counsel Robert Mueller, alleged that the Russian government was behind a sweeping conspiracy to interfere in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. The grand jury indicted 12 Russian military intelligence officers on charges that they had hacked Hillary Clinton's campaign and the Democratic Party, releasing tens of thousands of stolen and politically damaging communications. President Donald Trump wrapped up a turbulent 30-hour visit to England, dropping by Windsor Castle for tea with the queen and lavishing praise on Prime Minister Theresa May after earlier questioning May's leadership in an interview. Thousands crammed the streets of London to vent their anger over Trump's first official visit to Britain.

One year ago: President Joe Biden, opening his first trip to the Middle East, offered anxious Israeli leaders strong reassurances of his determination to stop Iran's growing nuclear program, saying he'd be willing to use force "as a last resort." A former CIA software engineer accused of causing the biggest theft of

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classified information in the agency's history was convicted at a New York City retrial. A judge rejected a request from actress Amber Heard to set aside the \$10 million judgment awarded against her in favor of her ex-husband, Johnny Depp.

Today's Birthdays: Game show announcer Johnny Gilbert (TV: "Jeopardy!") is 95. Actor Patrick Stewart is 83. Actor Harrison Ford is 81. Singer-guitarist Roger McGuinn (The Byrds) is 81. Actor-comedian Cheech Marin is 77. Actor Daphne Maxwell Reid is 75. Actor Didi Conn is 72. Actor Gil Birmingham is 70. Singer Louise Mandrell is 69. Rock musician Mark "The Animal" Mendoza (Twisted Sister) is 67. Actor-director Cameron Crowe is 66. Former tennis player Anders Jarryd is 62. Comedian Tom Kenny is 61. Country singer-songwriter Victoria Shaw is 61. Bluegrass singer Rhonda Vincent is 61. Actor Kenny Johnson is 60. Roots singer/songwriter Paul Thorn is 59. Country singer Neil Thrasher is 58. Actor Ken Jeong is 54. Singer Deborah Cox is 50. Actor Ashley Scott is 46. Rock musician Will Champion (Coldplay) is 45. Actor Fran Kranz is 42. Actor Aya Cash is 41. St. Louis Cardinals catcher Yadier Molina is 41. Actor Colton Haynes is 35. Actor Steven R. McQueen is 35. Soul singer Leon Bridges is 34. Actor Hayley Erin ("General Hospital") is 29. Actor Kyle Harrison Breitkopf is 18.

## Yard and Moving Sale

Saturday, July 15th

Sunday, July 16th

8AM to 4PM

40801 134th St, Groton

3/4 mile east of County Dumpster Site  
at Junction of US Hwy 12 & County Hwy 12E.

### Alot of items!

- Household items
- Yard & Garage Items
- Fishing equipment
- Men's, Women's and Girl's Clothing
- Purses, Shoes
- Herb Books
- New Tupperware
- Canning jars

***Most items - just make a reasonable offer.***